



LOVE LETTERS OF A PRIEST

BY

Patricia Lindsay Russell

Author of "SMOLDERING FIRES," Etc.



Australasian Authors' Agency
Melbourne



THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES



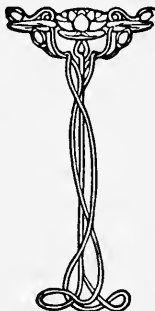
Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

Love Letters of a Priest





LOVE LETTERS OF A PRIEST



By Patricia Lindsay Russell

AUTHOR OF "SMOULDERING FIRES," ETC.

AUSTRALASIAN AUTHORS' AGENCY
MELBOURNE

PK
6037
S4277710

DEDICATION

To YOU

Who will Remember



“ Nos heures intimes ô ma chère
Me semblent comme un fil perlé
. . . Pour calmer ma douleur amère
Je prie, en les comptant, pour toi

“ O souvenirs, pleins de regrets
O bonheur vain ! O triste joie
Je baise perle à perle mon . chapelet
Afin d'apprendre

Baiser la croix.”



SACRIFICIUM



(Orate, —, ut meum ac vestrum sacrificium acceptabile fiat apud Deum Patrem Omnipotentem.)

I see him offer up the Mass
Upon the altar, as I pass
Through the old chapel once again.
The flowers blur, the tapers wane,
Faint incense floats and fills the air.
The folk are kneeling low at prayer.

Within a shadowed niche I stand,
And beat my breast at the command
Of tinkling bell and muttered word.
Low rumbling as of thunder stirred,
From those who reverent kneel and pray,
(As I did in Youth's Yesterday.)

Upon her shrine the Virgin stands
With upturned face and outflung hands.
Her painted eyes unseeing stare
At me whose lips can form no prayer.
(Mother of Sorrows! Can I pray?
He offers up the Mass to-day.)

The lilies blur against the wall.
I hear a far-off curlew call
From out the fragrant wild Bush-heart.
(O Love that sears, O Laws that part)
Here in this Church, know ye who pray,
The Double Sacrifice to-day?

SACRIFICIUM.

A girl's white soul—a life once sweet,
Trampled and broken neath his feet,
And there lies, too, all Hope, all Faith,
There naught is left save Love's pale wraith,
And of life's golden rosary
The iron cross remains for me.

The Holy Lamp burns red and low,—
Swayeth the censer to and fro,
With muttered word—the chaliced wine
Doth slowly turn to Blood Divine—
This wafer—Christ! (O, Eyes that yearn
How heartsick from it all ye turn.)

Mother of Sorrows! Can I pray?
He offers up the Mass to-day,
And speaks of some far Paradise.
The folk look up with reverent eyes,
As like some white-stoled saint, he stands,
Too pure for Earth, and Life's demands
(But under the rain-sodden mould
I see a little babe, long cold.)

A REVERIE



Your home and mine, Dear Heart,
A long low window looking to the west,
O'er softly sloping fields and mist—
Crowned hills, that start
From out the peaceful scene like guardians of the blest.
A long low window looking to the west,
A cushioned window seat wherein to rest
At eventide and watch the night
Come down—a welcome guest.

Your home and mine, Dear Heart,
A garden fashioned old and running wild
With roses blooming red,
An Eden far removed from city-mart
A scented nook wherein the rosary of love is said,
A garden filled with roses blooming red,
The summer sky soft blue up overhead
(And in the whole world only you and I
When all is said).



PREFATORY LETTER

FROM

THE WOMAN



“Ah non ! Dans nos âmes est resté
Le doux souvenir de nos jours de plaisir
De jeunesse ete d’été passés.”



Prefatory Letter from the Woman



Dear ——,

Do you remember that night in the presbytery, St. ——'s Presbytery, when I had cried—so unhappy, so desolately lonely at the thought of the strange world into which I was going without you, and you took me into your arms and carried me to the big chair by the fireplace? There we stayed, I sobbing a little, leaning quiet against you, your cheek to mine; while you whispered of love unending. So through all that is to be, through all that has been, I shall remember the words you whispered then, and though you have broken every promise you made then. The silence that has risen between us I see through a mist of tears—you only dimly through the veil of misunderstanding; but I think, in both of our hearts, memory will linger of the time when neither cared, in that hour of parting, if the door had opened and all the archbishops in the world had marched in. We two would have gone then gladly out into the world, rich in that we were together. But now—Oh, dearest, what is this that has risen between us?

Somewhere, far away, this letter will reach you. Will you, reading it, understand all that surges to-night in my heart—that heart which will so soon be giving up all the problems of life? One thing—and one only—stays in it out of the past: the longing that, before I shall come to that final Night and the curtain of Life be rung down on my poor play of “Let’s pretend,” that you shall come to me. There are so many things I might say; but only one, and that is that you will some day know, by all I have uncomplainingly borne, how much I loved you. Long ago we used to speak of that lonely time when we might not be near each other. I think we meant Death—and I did not look upon it then as now. But I want you to know, always, that I loved you, until the poor eyes of me that have grown sad with hopeless watching, were closed to open no more this side of the grave.

And the other?—I don’t know. I have no longer the little foolish beliefs that do for us when we are children. Perhaps, had I lived to be very old, they would come back again; but there would still be the long, empty middle of things when one had lost youth, but still went blindly on, with a vague feeling somewhere that for the sake of the Faith of our Fathers one must still go on—somehow.

I only know this now, that when I die, and the poor tired body of me is in the Mother Earth, that I shall be ever near you—grieving with you in sorrow, radiant in your joy, praying for you always—in spite of all that has been, in spite of the fact that this fatal illness lies at your door. I know

that there will be some times when that spirit communion will bring me nearer you than all our life together, and we will forget all the unhappiness, the searing bitterness: only that we loved; nay, love each other.

For in these days of mine, days passing, alas! so swiftly, I have been shown many things. I understand much that I could not understand before. And my heart goes out to you, Boy of mine, dear Child of mine, with all the starved, motherly tenderness that is in a woman, and it seems to be gathered up, and in me hold that of all women together. So nothing but tenderness shall brood over you, dear Boy, who was so swayed by Fear and Superstition that he could not see the Right.

I too feel a child in some moods lately, a little helpless child—very weary, very tired of all earth things. Life holds nothing now, since you went out of it. Long, long ago, someone who must have known what is in a woman's heart wrote a song—

“The night has a thousand eyes
The day but one,
Yet the light of a whole world dies
When day is done.

“The mind has a thousand eyes
The heart but one,
Yet the light of a whole life dies
When Love is done.”

And so with me: the light of a whole world—a whole life—gone.

Dear Heart, I had hoped, when I knew the ending was in sight, that I would put from me all earthly

longing and look towards that other world—but I cannot. I hate to die. Oh, I do not want to die. And yet—to go on living—without your love! I live in a dream world now, play “pretends” as we did long ago in ——. So real it oft is, that when I shut my eyes at night you bend over and kiss me—tenderly as in those past happy days of our love. “Good-night, dearest!” you say to me, and I answer softly, “Good-night, dear, dear Boy!” “*Dieu vous garde.*” And then I sleep, my face on your arm as of old, with my last waking memory of your cheek against mine.

Sometimes in the bitter, sleepless hours of pain (I suffer so sometimes) I come back to the world of Realisation, and O God, the suffering! Doctor—is bitter sometimes, but I tell him that it could not be otherwise. He wanted to send—but I was afraid. Fear that you would not come held me. If you were to refuse—O, I must not think of it, dearest.

I go back to my childhood often lately. Sometimes I am toddling along the pathway of the old garden at ——, turning up things to see how they grow. Sometimes my brother and I, hand in hand, are off to school again. It all comes back so vividly—my home life, the Little Mother, the Dear Dad—all never so dear as now. (They have gone out of my life—many years—because of you, but never out of my heart.) Then I am toddling off to Mass with old Father, hanging on to his big hand; and across the years his Irish brogue comes back, with all the tender memories I hold of him. Poor Father! who found rest years ago in some Irish cemetery, far

away from the Australia he had grown to love. They said many things of him, but I could never believe evil, because to my child-soul he stood for all I once held sacred.

How clearly Retrospection brings things back! I am happy in my childhood remembrances, happy in my girlhood—singing, dancing down that part of the Roadway of Life; and then I come to the Crossroads—and find you. And in the finding, now, there is sorrow, and tears, and joy, and laughter—and sorrow again.

I often write things lately. There is nothing else to do now—just write and write, until another hand than mine writes “Finis.” I am sending you a bundle of letters, that some day, when — is old enough to know, you will send; or take. In my dreams I see you taking them, explaining many things; and I will not see aught else but this. I am thinking that—after I am gone—you may feel differently; for the world moves on and Enlightenment comes.

With these last days all the old passionate anger goes out of me. Its last expiring flame went to you in that letter you answered so bitterly—the letter long burnt, but the words still seared on my heart. Fame I used to dream of in the old days—and Fortune. Too late these two things have come knocking at my door, have come into the Entrance Hall only of my life; for they enter not into this room where I am dying—only you.

Oh, I haven't any of the old pride left now, Beloved. If you were nearer, or I able to go to you,

I would kneel at your feet and beg of you to come back to the old days, the old tender ways. Sometimes, in these long hours of pain, comes one in the guise of you, hard and selfish and heartless; one saying "I must put myself first always—and then the Church." And then I hear you asking me to come to you on terms I would not accept years ago; that I cannot now. For we looked at things from different view-points—you and I, who were so near in other things. I think there is nothing so much of a tragedy in all the world than waiting—waiting day in, day out, for the lifted latch, the sound of a footstep on the threshold that never comes; and each day waking with the thought, "Perhaps to-day" and "Perhaps to-night." Then lying awake—always listening, listening till the last tram hurries on into the night and the last footfall passes. Then to turn one's face to the wall and pretend, lest the heart might break. So the Little Mother whom this side of the grave I shall never see comes in dreams into the darkened room in the hours when the World stands hushed; and her cool hands lie, as of old, on my forehead; and I hear the Dear Dad saying softly, "Any pain, Childie"; and I cling fast to the dear toil-worn hands that once slaved so hard for me, and whisper, "It will soon be gone." I stretch out longing arms to the darkness, and find but emptiness. Of late, somewhere from far off, come the words, "There shall be no more sorrow, nor weeping; neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things shall have passed away," and so, also, Dearest, into the darkened room comes

sometimes—God, whom I never found in all my years of allegiance to the Church.

In the feverish hours I think of the cool woods we knew too, the road winding on and on, and the wattle all in blossom along the creek, the little old, deserted cemetery, with its sunken graves and fallen headstones, in the bend. We often went there—you and I. We go there now when night falls. The same sky looks down here to-night—on you far away, and on me here in my confined room, and on that road we once trod together. The same sky—the same stars! There is comfort in that, and the thought brings us nearer together and lifts away the crushing weight of desolation. My heart used to go out in my childhood to some poor caged rabbit lying all through the night in a tearing, grinding agony of pain. I, too, go through it all. I feel as some poor bird, who loved the sunlight, the highest trees; knew the far-off mountains, and all the wondrous secrets of the bush, and then shot, flying low with broken wings, slowly to flutter through the dark undergrowth until the end.

O, Dearest, if into your life shall come again that hour when you ask yourself many things of our religion, put aside from you all its corroding superstitions. Don't believe things because our ancestors did; and if the small voice comes again, listen to it. Think of God as I think of Him—as a Spirit of Goodness, between Whom and themselves, for the sake of mammon, men have drawn a veil. I would put God first, if I were you, and not the Church; for I am thinking many things as I lie

here; many, many things which all my years in the Church never taught me; and all those things—scapulars, rosaries, medals, crucifixes, Sacred Heart ribbons—are swept away. In the last hour of this life I shall have no priest near me, nor preacher, unless you, Dear Heart, come; and then you shall not come as a priest. They will bury me as a Catholic, I suppose, and write “Requiescat in pace” on the cross over me. None passing by will ever know the thoughts that surged in my heart, or that that heart broke when it found out the ghastly mockery of the thing called Faith.

Dear Boy, I want you to be good in the future, to put the past behind you; for I think your life lived truly, lived honestly, really lived so, will count far more than all the indulgences the Church gives. And the God of the open sky, of the wind, of green far fields, counts more than that creed-bound God of cathedrals, who has unwittingly been made to cause more ruin, more desolation, more unhappiness than the world has time to realise. But the sun on the sea, on the woods, the green trees murmuring in the wind, the shrilling of birds in the coppice, and a thousand flowers nodding in the grass, will one day bring you the truth. “Raise the stone, and there thou shalt find Me. Cleave the wood, and there am I.”

I think the first glimmering of that thought of Light came to me about three years ago. Not in the Cathedral where I used to kneel in futile prayer before a statue, with my eyes so dim with tears I could not see the altar; but later, in the Hospital

of Silence, that sanctuary for women who suffer alone. I can see now, as I write, the light white walls, the vagrant flickering bars of sunlight from the world outside, and the door where Life and Death stood side by side on the threshold. Outside was the world, sweet with sunshine and flower and calling bird, and the great undertone of the city throbbed on. Life moving ever onwards. Life calling, sweetly, relentlessly, and into this House of Pain floated only the terrible haunting notes that sob in one's ears through the melody of Life.

Here was the tragedy of Love desecrated, Hope slowly killed, Faith torn from its altar, Youth and Purity forever past. And one went then with bowed head, in mental and physical anguish beyond words, through that grim Doorway of the House of Pain, knowing that Life and Death followed, side by side, waiting, and that neither mattered, for the Bitterness of Death was already past——there was no Hope, no Faith, no Love.

But——sometimes——God comes——in a little child. There are times when I get afraid—not of Death, or what comes after—only afraid of leaving all that one holds dear on earth. And the day sweeps on to its ending; so, too, the Day of Life—and Night, Night, with its shadows, comes also; and Darkness, through which mine eyes cannot pierce—but overhead are the stars.

(Rest of this letter not for publication.)



LOVELETTERS OF A PRIEST



Some of the earlier letters, written in the first years of their meeting. The dotted lines are sentences obliterated, mostly because of references to people still living, and holding positions in the ecclesiastical, political, and social world. A large number of the letters of this period have not been given in for publication for various reasons. Sufficient, however, are given to outline the story, and to give an idea of the different characters of the man and woman.



Love Letters of a Priest

St. _____'s Presbytery,
_____.

Dear,——

It would be best for you and for me if I didn't write to-night. I've tried to walk it off, passing your house, and seeing all lights out, for it's late indeed.

I'm miserable to-night—depressed—thinking over every word you said to me. It is four whole weeks since you spoke to me last, because I forgot myself..... Dearest, my love surely could not be an insult, you know you didn't mean it when you said so.....and many other things, and yet you said even then that you loved me.

Cannot you understand that the love of a man and the love of a woman are far different with a difference I can't explain? I would not if I could. To-day I saw you laughing and talking with young ——, you saw me bow as you passed, yet you did not speak or look my way. Now, I am sorry I did not go back and make you speak, then the thought

of this gossipy town weighed on my heart. They seem to be talking enough because I brought you openly home from the library, and carried your books down the main street. I didn't care that night what the whole town thought, and I thought you didn't care either; but I cannot understand you now. I cannot look at things from your viewpoint. Is it because it is too high, or I incapable of understanding a woman's thoughts? Yours are too high, too romantic for this everyday world. You told me, it seems years ago, that you loved me, and you said so in that last bitter letter of a month ago, but I did not think you would return my note unopened to-day. Why? I think even young ——, the postboy, has some inkling. I have had a couple of anonymous letters. I suppose from some of my parishioners. I can pretty well guess who.

It had made me desperate, the ball last night where you were the happiest evidently (every time I saw you, you were laughing), but you looked the other way every time I passed. Has your love died then in this month of separation of your making? Dear, I want you—badly. I want to talk with you—to explain—to tell you many things of which I cannot write. Perhaps you will send me this letter back. I am sending it by the groom, enclosed in a letter about the bazaar, lest your mother see it, and question. Did you know that she asked me to look after you and the other girls in her absence? and she is going away next month. I want to see you—try and understand how much, and how greatly I need you. I am wretched to-night,

thinking over many, many things—over what is and what might be. . . .

I am sending you a poem I cut out of a magazine last week. Somehow it haunts me—brings me added unhappiness.

Dearest, our day is over,
Ended the dream divine ;
You must go back to your life,
I must go back to mine.
Back to the joyless duties,
Back to the fruitless tears,
Loving and yet divided,
All through the empty years.

.

I often dream lately of a little home—somewhere where the paddocks are always green, no sandstorms or wintry mud—one of those old red brick houses, facing the east, with wide verandahs, sunlit gardens sloping to a river, bay windows, and honeysuckle nodding over the porch—a real porch with seats, where I and my pipe can be content—and you opposite! Then the dream ends, and I hear instead the bell pealing for early Mass; but the glow of the dream remains. If I could only tell you all my thoughts—but I cannot—such thoughts are best left to myself. But there are forbidden thoughts that come sometimes when I think of the time when I shall be an old man, and you an old woman— but I cannot picture you growing old. I wonder what it will be to grow old—alone.

For you I hope the years can only bring sunshine and happiness; you are made for these things. And

I—there are two men in me—always remember that, Dearest—the man who loves you very, very dearly, in all things, and for always; and then there is that other—the priest, who fights thoughts that come surging, clamoring for utterance, but which must be suppressed. Dear little Girl, I wish that either I were a stronger man—or a stronger priest! I know it is absurd for me to be jealous, but I can't help it; and that is why I don't like your dancing, or going home even from golf with —, and people matrimonially coupling your name with one or the other. They wonder why you do not "walk out" with one of these country clodhoppers—as if you could. I don't know what I should do. You were vexed with me for following you up the hill on Sunday evening after vespers, but I hadn't seen you for two whole days. When am I going to see you? Will you meet me to-morrow night, instead of going to vespers. Come around by the side gate that opens on to — road. I will be waiting for you. It will be dark; but come through the chapel paddock, and I will meet you there. Come, if it is only for half an hour. There is something I want particularly to say; and, Dearest, believe that Heaven is not opposed to Love.

Always yours in thought and being,

St. ———'s Presbytery,
————.

Dear ———,

Is anything wrong? Why haven't you written? I am going into "Retreat" in a few days, and I must see you before then. Dear ———, do write. I've been thinking all sorts of things about you, and wondering at your silence. There hasn't been one hour during the day that I haven't been thinking of you ——— never seemed such an empty place before, little sweetheart. . . .

With love always,
From ———.

P.S.—I do not think that Bridget ——— knew who I was the other night. You may only imagine she has mentioned it to your aunt. You must remember that your aunt, forsaking the Church, is a heretic in any case. It is a very deplorable state of affairs; and you must not allow her to influence you in any way, or to discuss the Faith.

St. ———'s Presbytery.

Dear,

I am sorry over last night—miserably repentant. You say that you expect the old excuses, “the old weak excuses.” Dear ———, I often think you are too hard on me, considering my environment. You have yourself said that a temperate man in the priesthood is the exception, not the rule. I meant to keep my promise to you that I would not touch another drop of intoxicating liquor. And yet, with the sports, and the concert and the dance afterwards! How could it be otherwise? I had worked hard managing the Sports, and felt fairly done up all day, and the little I had went to my head. I thought your letter unnecessarily cruel under the circumstances. If I didn't care so much I would not bother even writing about the matter, which is really too trivial to mention.

Was I the only priest drinking last night? How about Father ———, who had to be carried to his buggy; and Father ———, who carried on so at the pub that the Irish Doctor had to be called in, and afterwards drove him right out of the town? You didn't mention them at all; only state that I was “responsible for the disgracefully drunken condition of the sports.” My dear ———, don't you think

that is rather a strong statement to make. I was very angry with you when I opened your letter this morning, and only the knowledge that you regret these things as soon as the letter is posted, kept me from answering very bitterly—in fact I debated whether I would answer at all. Yet in my heart, little girl, I know I love you for these things that make me most angry with you.....

I'll drop in for a cup of tea this afternoon, and I hope you'll find a moment to tell me how sorry you are about it. Dearest, I know I am not wholly good. No man, whatever he be, is; so it isn't my fault. We are as we are made. And as for one in my position, you have no idea of the feeling that hangs about one on a pedestal, or the strained atmosphere it creates.....and other things of which I have spoken. "A priest for ever," sayeth Melchisedech and the God who made us answers, "and a man for ever."

You say you are unhappy over it, little girl. Well, see me this evening at the old meeting place, and I will promise you again, faithfully, and we will forget last night as if it never happened. You say "they" are all talking about it. I suppose "they" are Protestants, who wouldn't dare to say it openly. My Catholics won't say it at all; they daren't; and even if they do, they'll find more excuses for me in one hour that I could think of in a year. . . .

O Little Sweetheart, your postscript, as always, holds all of you—the real You of you—loving, unselfish and true. . . .

Sometimes by one look of yours you make me feel more than all your letters can say. . . .

Believe me that sometimes there is no more wretched man in the world than I. I told you that once, didn't I? when we walked on that lonely road by the Church, and talked of many things that priests should not talk about.

I wonder if you and I would ever have the courage to go away from this little country world of ours. I live in a circle that seems closing in around lately. There are times when I hate this life of mine, . . .

Dearest, you say that God comes first; and I too, in another sense, say the Church is God to us priests, for it must come first. How different we are—we who love each other. Your conception of things is so illimitable, so hopeful. You look right over the Church as it were, and see a dim nebulous haze, out of which looks always the face of God. Is it because you are nineteen, when one is nearer Him than at any other time of life? And for me—is it environment that my eyes can go no farther than the Cathedral spire? or my thoughts go only to the Pope at Rome? . . .

I must write or talk no more like this. But your letters make me think always—thoughts which should have no place in a priest's brain.

You are just a girl . . . I nearly old enough to be your father; yet you are all things in one, for you give me the love of a reverent daughter, sweetheart, and mother. It is that last, dear, maternal side of you that lectures me I know. Dearest,

I couldn't live at —— if it weren't for you; so when you talk of going away, lest our love bring unhappiness, remember that . . . I do want you . . . I shall always want you. If you cannot see me this evening, let me know this afternoon when I come to the house if you have a chance. If not, write and tell me when I can see you, and we can talk things over.

Your loving and unhappy

“_____.”

St. "————'s" Presbytery,

————.

And so you are going away, and without a word. Dearest, you are making me the most miserable man on God's earth, and for no reason whatever. I suppose the truth of the matter is that you have never really cared for me, and that I am to understand that you are indeed a flirt. Your brief note explains nothing, only says that "everything between us must be forgotten." Dearest, why?

Is it because of the foolish notion you had in your head that we must not care for each other? I thought that had passed when I told you many things. You could only bring good to my soul, and happiness to a life that, as you know, is lonely and unsatisfied. I cannot forget that in knowing you has been the happiness that seemed to sweep aside all other things. I had grown to see things through your eyes, finding beauty in common-place things, that were never common-place to you. But now, if you go away, I shall see nothing but a dreary place, shut in by hills that seem to mock at one's limitations. . . .

Do you remember how you preached at me on my weaknesses . . . I know I am weak in many

things; but my love for you is the strongest, purest thing my life has ever held. Will you not help me then to strength?

Dearest, do not go away without seeing me.

Yours as always,

“_____.”

St. J————'s Presbytery,
Wednesday night.

Dear ——,

Just a "surprise note" that will travel down to the city with you—just a something from the country to remind you of someone whom you're leaving behind you in the backblocks; and to tell you again, and yet again, not to get that small, curly head of yours turned with flattery, but to come back as soon as possible. Shure (though you've not started yet at the time of my writing it), you shouldn't have gone. I don't see any difference in you being a debutante in town or here in the bush.

And why did you leave it to the last moment to tell me, and calmly in front of your people too, as if you would not know how my heart would be taking it? What does the district, anyhow, want with Farmers' Excursions, when there's never a farmer goes on them; only half my choir girls, my organist, and those very parishioners who would be much better employed filling in subscription lists for a new chapel, and looking after their souls, than wearing their leather ones out on the dusty, uneven flags of the city streets.

You, of all people, shouldn't have gone. Apart from the old organ having hysterics for the next

few Sundays, when —, who is better at churning butter or lassoing a stray calf, takes charge, apart from that, at eighteen you are too young to be travelling, and to all places, the city. It is full of wickedness, and they say its society is the worst (your relatives of course excepted).

I went past your place last night, after vespers (at which you were not present). I wanted to go in, but had the saving grace to remember I'd been in three times already during the day, and that there would probably be a lot of people as usual.

And to think, Gille ma chree, that you will be going in the morning, and that I will be there on that cold bleak railway station apparently to send a parcel of mission scapulars to the next parish. Then accidentally I must turn round and discover you, surrounded of course by a lot of people who would be better home in their beds than annoying their friends. In shaking your hand, I will have to drop this note in it, and I think I'll be taking a brick in the other (though what excuse I'll be making for it I don't know), if that fellow — is at the train seeing you off. I might accidentally drop it on his foot, wishing it was his head.

Now don't be laughing when you get to this part, for there's nothing surer than that — — will be sitting in your carriage, asked of course by your people to look after you.

Remember that he has a sister, too. She has a reputation as a dressmaker; but there's something she's better at than sewing, and that is using her tongue; for there's many the characters

that are ripped away in that little shandry-dan of hers, where all the gossips of the town collect. So, dear ——, be careful, and of course you'll say nothing. I wonder if you are thinking of me to-night, and knowing what is in my heart. I should be travelling down to-morrow myself. I could tell Father —— that my teeth wanted attending to, and that I could go as far as ——; but then, what can a poor devil do with a hundred and one confessions, three babies to christen, a golf match, and a funeral seven miles away.?

I won't be signing this in case you drop it; but you will know it holds all of my heart. Didn't I tell you months before I had a "confession" to make, and you only laughed? You are always laughing and making fun; but I am glad you did not when I told you, as I tell you now, that I have been in love with you ever since the day Fate and the Bishop sent me to ——.

“Saint ———’s” Presbytery.

Dear Little Girl,

Do you know it is three days—three long, wet days since you left, and never a word from you? Write to-night and tell me all you are doing, and if you are enjoying yourself so much that you are forgetting that there’s such a place at the back of beyond as —, and that it holds some people who want to hear from you, immediately if not sooner, as old — would say. I called in to-day, after waiting vainly for the last post, to see your people, for the first time since you left, but I’ve been very busy.

Your mother was busy as usual, with one eye on a new ball dress for your sister —, and the other on the spring cleaning—or will it be a summer cleaning? Anyhow the house was just suffering a recovery. The whole place looked different, the piano was closed, the girls out at vesper (where I should have been), and the children in bed early. No one singing or laughing about. (I think you’d better shorten your holiday.) Your father gave me his usual hearty welcome and whisky. It’s a big lonely barrack of a house, that place. I was telling your father so; but he says, with all due respect to your mother, that the “master of the house” likes

it so, that she won't leave it. He said, with the little twinkle in the eye that reminds me of you, that she lives in the town so that she can keep her eye on him.

Your father confessed that he missed you more than all the rest put together, and your mother told me brightly that they had received two letters from you already, and all about your gay friends in the city. (Have you forgotten me altogether?)

You will get this letter to-morrow afternoon, I should say, by the final town delivery, or it may be the next morning early. Fancy you being hundreds of miles away from here. I suppose I may hear from you to-morrow, and my letter may cross yours.

I think you had better send me a discreet wire, saying you are alright, and "not forgetting," sign it O'Toole, or O'Flaherty, or Mac something, so that the post office people here will be thinking it's one of my parishioners keeping the pledge; and indeed it will be, but not to their thinking.

With love always from

P.S.—I suppose you will be hearing all about — the new Premier. I saw by the paper this afternoon that — was in the political heavens. So all's right with the Catholic world. It's pouring rain here to-night, all the gutters in — street overflowing. I have been over the flat for a walk, and it is fairly swamped. I think we are in for a week's steady downpour at the least. The whole country looks flat and gray and uninteresting . . . like life

sometimes. It's either blazing hot here or pouring rain. I confess I can't see anything pretty about this confounded hole of a place. Are you tired of town yet? It seems like three years to me since you left, instead of three days.

St. ———'s Presbytery,
—————.

Dear ———,

For some reason, that I do not know, you have not written to me yet. What is it? Has anyone been telling you lies about me; you told me once that you would never listen to gossip, but of course if it is written to you it may influence you, but then I think you would surely tell me. I have been in such anxiety over the mail that Father ——— noticed it the other day, and said I must be expecting a Bishopric, so I have been wandering accidentally down ——— street, during the mail hour and intercepting the post boy. There are always letters, but not one from you. Each day I expect a letter, and none has come so far. It has made me unsettled and unhappy, and you know to what road that depression drives me. So do write . . . I have been keeping straight, and have not taken more than is good for me since you left.

I should write you a cheerful, humorous letter, but to-night I can't. I have been to the house twice to-day, just happened to drop in after leaving the post boy, and have the pleasure of hearing bits of your letters. Your sister ——— says she expects you to bring home a few "aides-de-camp,

politicians and other ornaments," and that if they can be married off to a few of the old maids here that my fees will endow a "Worn-Out Priests" Home. She is a "hard case," indeed, and tells me so many different stories about you that I don't know what to believe. She was reading your letter out to-day to the family, putting in as usual things that were never written by you, until she had the kiddies in hysterics, and your mother on the point of wiring for you to come home from "that dreadful city."

But you seem to be having a very good time all the same. I suppose you hear all the news from that happy-go-lucky Irish family of yours. I was wondering if your sister —— might be saying something to you in her usual jesting way that you would have taken in earnest, and if that would account for your silence. She is always teasing me, but I often think she doesn't like me very much, for there's many a sting behind some of the things she says. Its little the reverence there is up this way.

The picnic of the "Sodality of the Sacred Heart" will be held next Thursday, in the river paddock.

Do you remember the day we met? It was the Children of Mary's picnic, and you were just home from finishing schools (and Protestant ones at that). I can remember even your blue dress, your two long curls, and the pink roses in your floppy hat, you swinging under the trees, and looking the prettiest girl in the parish, with a poor devil of a priest swinging you until he caught the eye of old Mother

———, and remembered that God made the world, and the devil filled the country towns with gossips!

The days seem years, so write and tell me all you are doing. Maybe there is something I could do for you?

With love always,

P.S.—No news of any moment for me to send you. The rain has cleared off, and the farmers are looking jubilant when they think you're not watching them. It would never do for a farmer to lose his reputation for pessimism, would it? I drove out past —— to-day, and called in on my way back. They are great admirers of yours, especially —— . I must get him married off to somebody before you come back, in case you change your mind towards him.

St. ———, Presbytery,
—————.

My Dear “———,”

I’ve been thinking hard since your last letter. How my heart went up when I saw it, and how it went down when I read it! If one read your letter and did not see you, one could imagine a gray-haired person, with glasses and a severe expression, on a lecturing tour, instead of being . . . but there, I forgot I must write as you wish, I suppose. So here goes a most “sensible” letter as your heart, or the space where it should be, could desire.

All are well at home, but the piano is out of tune, and—has had the toothache for three days. Poor Florrie ——— died yesterday on the way to ——— hospital, and I officiated at her burial this morning. The little churchyard on the hill is a dreary place, yet I have heard you speak of the beauty of it, and this dusty old town, but then you are different to all other people. I believe you’d find beauty in old Mrs. ———’s cast eye. I often drop in to see your brother’s wife, and quite accidentally the conversation veers round to you. It

seems to me you write charmingly to everybody but one poor devil. Don't be too hard on him.

Its very silly of you, dear little girl, to talk about friendship having to end between us when you come back. Has it done you any harm? Or me? I am afraid you are taking too much notice of the gossip here. What is there for them to talk about? And in what way have I been indiscreet?

St. _____'s Presbytery,
_____.

Dear _____,

Why do you write to me in that stilted manner that isn't a bit yours? You say you don't want to make me unhappy, yet every letter you have written since you went to —— has made me wretched. I open each one, thinking that at last you are going to write, and instead, a Model Parishioner writes to a Plaster-of-Paris priest, duly giving a daily recital of her doings in the gay city. I handed one carelessly over the table to Father —— last week, so that if he ever had any suspicion there was anything on between us, that letter of yours would effectually kill it. He laughed on reading your statement that "all the stars had turned out to be only drawing room lamps; and all the Literary Lions were held on a chain by their wives." He volunteered the cheering belief on rising that you "would probably marry well! You had the rare combination of looks and brains, and after a season in town couldn't be expected to settle down in ——." I had an insane desire to murder something for the whole day afterwards, and wrote you three different letters, which I tore up. Dear Gillema Chree, when are you coming back? I will promise to do anything you desire, if you only come

back soon. I can't help drawing comparisons between your life in the city and here, although your sister told me to-day, with a twinkle in her eyes, that you thought country boys far above the society youths, and that the gilded City Youth gets wrought up to hysteria a couple of times a day as to what color socks or ties he shall wear. "Faith," she says, "the only idea he has in his head, seems to be at what angle he shall put his hat on."

So you have made your debut. I could imagine it all from your letter as if I were there, particularly where you describe the old dowagers with hair far from the land of its birth, and the latest thing in complexions.

Yes, you are right about Roman Catholics and Society. They are not social assets, but, though of course Society has to kow-tow to His Grace, and the leading prelates, it seems to have a stiff knee until election time.

Fancy you thinking that — at a reception looks like his own groom. Why, he's one of the most brilliant lawyers of the day. We're proud of him, I assure you. Ireland and obesity seem synonymous, don't they?

So you are going to stay a week with the —'s. —. Isn't he a member of Parliament? If so, my dear, you'll be hearing nothing else than the forthcoming election, when every common or garden variety of citizen is transfigured by a halo. Every man with a vote is a god at this time of the year. Was that why you were asking me what the Catholic Vote was? Well, the Catholic Vote is a Bogey

of Straw in the fields of religion, frightening the politician-birds who squat on the shaky fence of thought and imagine the bogey to be the Egyptian Sphinx, or the Mighty Lever. The birds are easily caught. (But you mustn't tell the politician that, bedad!)

Write soon, and often, more often. I want to know all you are doing, and saying, and whom you are meeting. I would come down to see you if possible. What would you do if some day I walked in, Gille ma Chree?

With love always,

From ———.

P.S.—There is only one part of your letter that is really you, and that I will send herein for you to remember. It is this:—

“I'm a wee bit homesick all the time, for instance when my partner is murmuring something inane in my ears over the teacups, or my programme, and my tongue is answering, my thoughts are back in the home, the Dad, the Mother-mine and the whole happy-go-lucky family, and just when my best frocks are on I think if I could only have “home” near by, where I could run in and show them. Do drop in as usual if you can, if you are still not busy. Perhaps just at this time you will be there, with little —— on your knee, you tweaking her curls, and the other dear kiddies leaning against you, while a pleasant rattle of cups and the smell of hot scones float in from the sitting room. And to-day the Dad will be out coursing. You see, I don't forget my old country town for all my “foine friends.”

I can just shut my eyes now, eyes a little dim with homesickness, and see the wind-bent trees by the creek, and the green of the young crop in the paddocks, with the crowd of men at the coursing, and the dogs skimming the brown, newly-ploughed ground. But the dinner bell is ringing now, and instead of a brown suit, felt hat, and leggings, I'm here in a dinner gown that would supply old Mrs. —— with enough gossip for two weeks."

And the poor divil that read that bit, felt he wasn't forgotten either, for all that there wasn't a word about him in it, and that he'd been treated as that big heart of yours wouldn't treat a swagman.

Goodnight, dearest, a thousand kisses.

HER LETTER



In my heart there stirs a thought.
Out of what vague fear is't wrought?
Dost foreshadow days to come?



The Girl Writes



What can I say? I am not hard, or heartless, or any of the things you said, and I am not a coquette. I have not forgotten, but—I want you to forget. Couldn't you see why I went away—and the reason why I asked Mother to let me stay a month longer? I want you to forget me—we must both forget, or to think of it only as a passing madness. I thought if I went away it would be to you just an incident which you would forget. How can I go back unless . . .? You have asked me to tell the truth once and for all, and I tell it you. Yes, I do care, but we must put such a love out of our lives entirely. I must remember that I am a good Catholic, and oh, Father —, if it be true that in my hands lie so much power, let me use it, with God's help, for the purpose for which it was ordained.

I must remember, even if you forget, what this may mean. After all, it was only a kiss, a few words you must think of now with regret. I have tried to think it born of the loneliness which you have spoken of, and the weariness and depression

consequent on a long day of confessions. I won't think it anything else, nor must you. I am not very old, but I know that love could only end in disaster for you, for us both. You see, I put you first; I shall always do so. Does not that one incident that you have quoted out of a host of others, show how impossible it is that things can go on as before?

I want you to come in and see the dear Dad and the Mother, who reverence you, when I come back, but not quite so often.

As for you—and for me! Well, it is only something passed and gone—the madness of a moment. I am just a girl, my life bound up in my home,—your friend, your dear, dear friend always; and the daughter of the man and woman who believe in the Church and in its priests, and in you, before all others.

You have dedicated your life to the service of the Church, “forsaking all else.” I don't know what the vows you speak of are, beyond that they indissolubly bind, and that nothing but Death can break them.

If there is anything more to tell me, don't. Let me keep my faith, my faith in the Church—and—in you. God keep and guard you.

Always your friend,

“ St. ———’s,”
Monday.

Dear Gille ma Chree,

I am lonely without you. I could write you pages, but it would hold that always. There are very long days at — now, and the twenty days left seem as many years. As for your last letter, as if I could stop loving you, Alannah. How could I? I am very lonely to-night, and have had a most tiring day. Poor Mrs. — is dying of blood poisoning and there are a lot of sick calls as well. Father — cannot help, as his mother is seriously ill too, and he is feeling it more than I thought possible. You know we have both thought him hard and rather heartless, but he seems very upset now.

Your absence has told me a lot of things which I was not quite sure of, and your letter too. . . . I must never let you go away any more. Life is so short, and God knows there’s little of it we may have together. I’ve been thinking over that too—many strange thoughts that should not have come to me. I wish there could be never any partings between us again. Do you know how sometimes I long for you—“to have and to hold till Death do us part?” That has haunted me ever since — —’s wedding. I think the Irish Doctor has

some idea of my thoughts, for I am writing this at the —, and the Doctor, over by the window, is glancing at me now and again as if he would like to be looking over my shoulder. He is a keen student of human nature, and a good friend of yours—I hope to us both. But—I don't know. There's a look in those shrewd brown eyes of his I can't sometimes understand, a look he shouldn't have in any case towards his priest.

I think the steward must be imagining I have signed the pledge.

Good-night, Beloved, the clock has struck twelve. I will drop this in the post on the way home. Twelve o'clock, and one day nearer you.

With love always,

“_____.”

“St. ———’s” Presbytery,
————.

Dear ———,

Your last letter has nearly broken my heart. God knows I shouldn’t write like this, but I can’t help it. I was almost coming to see you, in spite of your request, that I should not, and then thought I would write instead. You remember all the things I said to you one night before we quarrelled. You were so different then. I told you then how much I cared, and I tell you now, enough to give up everything almost rather than lose you.

I am a priest as you say, but, Sweetheart, I am also a man, and next to the Church you are all the world holds for me. I think when I got your letter last night that I forgot the Church, forgot everything, only that I wanted you. And you love me? Dear, what laws can part lovers? Is it not better to snatch from life a little happiness, even if it be for Joy’s short hour? You know the inner loneliness of my life, and you understand and pity its weaknesses, and there are things, pray God! that your white soul shall never know. You say it is just an incident for me. Dear, you do not know

how I have always cared since I first saw you, nor how deeply.

Dear, write to me, if only a line now and again, and give me still your friendship, and the knowledge behind it of your affection. I promise you shall never regret it.

I have just read over what I have written, and know that it doesn't hold what I want to say. I feel depressed to-day, and wondering what you are doing as I write, wondering too how I could hope you would ever think of me. There is that religious barrier of which you make so much. Have you not read somewhere that "Love bridges all barriers?"

Good-night, Beloved. My love will always be about you at this hour, wrapping you round. Beloved, don't desert me! I may have seemed careless, or many things to you, I may have frightened you because of my love. I am a Priest, and a Man, but there is an awful barrier sometimes between the two, and a great loneliness. Sometimes the man in me and the priest fight a battle, but they both love you always.

Yours as ever,

"_____."

“St. ———’s.”

Dear Little Girl,

What can I say?—only “Forgive me” for my last letter; nay, three letters. Of course I should have known it was one of your sister’s jokes, but an engagement seemed so feasible, and you had not answered at least four letters. But you care, that is one thing that stands for me out of it all; and the other, that in a few days you will be back.

And when you come back, Little Girl, let me come and see you somewhere, and we will talk it out together. We will be friends then, near and dear friends, for I am very lonely as you know, and sometimes very unhappy. I often think, going back over my life. . . . (Not for publication.) Anyhow, dear, all that matters is that you are coming back, and that though next Sunday morning I will have to celebrate mass away at —, but in the evening I will be back for Benediction, and you will be there also. This is the last letter that can reach you before your return on Saturday afternoon, and in case I can’t see you then, don’t hurry home

after vespers. Wait until I come out, and I will walk down to the gate with you.

Yours as always,

“_____.”

P.S.—I couldn't quite understand one part of your letter—only the sadness evidently in your mind. What do you mean when you write: “Lately I am afraid of Life . . . and of Love . . . a new vague fear to which I can give no name.” And again: “Life is a strange thing. Its keyboard is at my hand, and my fingers have only touched the white octave of girlhood, those minor black notes, those deeper notes that throb in the bass, those high notes of the Soul! What has Life destined me to play?” I can never understand you when you write like this, no more than I could your telling me long ago, after one of my sermons on Hell, and its Eternal Torments, that if there were a Hell, you didn't want the Heaven of a God who would countenance it. And I said simply: “Shure, child, there's no hell, only what one makes for oneself on earth; but don't you be telling anyone I said so.” And you answered: “Then I look at God in a truer light.” There are lots of things I can't understand in you, but I love you for them all, Gille ma Chree.

[There are several letters, and many notes prior to and after this letter, not for publication. Most of them are on the same subjects contained in the following, and therefore their absence does not break into the continuity of the story.]

Letter.



We are having some beautiful days, Gille ma Chree! Has the sunshine only come with your letter? Yesterday, after the morning post, you and I went for a drive. You will pinch yourself at that and ask how you managed to be in two places at once. But you were . . . to me . . . So, yesterday afternoon, when we went "out for the day," it didn't matter that old Mrs. ——'s sick call was at the end of the journey, for on the way we passed the old House by the river on which we modelled our Dream House, and we talked about it. . . . Now and again you broke off to tell me about the beauty of this or that spot, or that the bramble-roses were pink as the heart of a shell, or else, nestling against my shoulder, you listened to the language of the trees, or sang softly for very happiness, as once you sang, coming home from a picnic a year ago, ere gossips started talking.

I too hear that wondrous speech of the Bush since I have met you, at least I heard it yesterday, I know, and so the long, yellow, dusty roads, and what had been once interminable gray of trees and landscape and sky, took on the misty beauty with which you had endowed them. It mattered not that Father —— says it's a "God-forsaken hole," or that before I met you, I too once thought so.

But yesterday the trees, and the magpie warbling happily in the new grass, said over and over again, what you and I have said to each other—"Love is Heaven, and Heaven is Love."

Because you came with me you will know how short the distance was, and how I passed without stopping that quaint, picturesque old hotel in the bend of the creek.

(I remember how one night in reality we drove home from there, you and I—that was the night you were so angry, because you found me there. . . .) That was a drive of silence, but yesterday was full of speech.

And old Mrs. — was not so ill after all! My parishioners never are, but they think that priests, like doctors, are simply on the earth to help them out of it (both with aqua largely dominating each prescription, though mine has the magical word *sancta* attached).

And of course I had to leave you in the buggy while I went indoors—you out in the sunshine, and I in that dim, airless room, where the fowls came in with the familiarity of long habit.

The pig would have been in also, but they killed him the week before, and there were so many well-salted bits of him hanging from the rafters, that even when gathered together it would have been hard to trace any family likeness.

I'm beginning to think if some of my parishioners had even a bowing acquaintance with fresh air, they'd live longer, bedad.

I read your letter, dearest, indeed a real letter

at last! I read it at least three times on the homeward journey.

The day before I had been in the depths of the "blues." I had begun the day by a few sharp words with Father —, and a dismal feeling of want. I tried to golf it off, and quail it off, and to —, but I mustn't tell you anything else. Suffice it to say that yesterday morning I got up, morose, wretched, and then at breakfast the mood swept away.

And it wasn't the breakfast! It was you, you—in the shape of two closely written pages in a square envelope. Why is it whenever I need you most you seem to know? You danced right out of the letter, and holding tight to my heart, said: "Now don't you think it's time you went to see poor old Mrs. —, and I'll be with you, though also, most also, I'll be home superintending afternoon tea cakes and scones, and afterwards their swift despatch by the farmers and their wives." "

How fond, Gille ma Chree, you are of your farmer-people, and how you love the weekly Sale-Day that brings them in, with their sheep and horses and cows. The only appreciation I have of them, "an' I say it as shouldn't," is that they return the compliment.

Old Mrs. — spoke of you—now don't say it was because I started it. You always say that, and it isn't true—at least, not always.

You will shake your head, and smile at that.

I don't know why I am writing you like this, except, Beloved, that sometimes a rare magic moment

comes into life, a Moment of Illumination that shows, ah! far more than I can write you. Perhaps to-night I shall strive to tell you . . . The man shall tell you, Beloved, what the priest dare not say. But you know it, don't you? You know that you came straight into my heart, a worn passee heart, very weary of many things. . . . And you are never going out.

Do you know, dearest, when I wrote that last line it was as if my pen slipped suddenly—and I remembered. Ah, dearest—Gille ma Chree, "Light of my heart," indeed—you know I want you always, want so much more of you—want you to stay. . . . Dear, come close to me in this letter, while I tell you a story, an old, old story, and yet one that is ever new.

There are only two people in it, and a Shadow—an ever-brooding Shadow. And of the two people one was a man belonging to the Shadow. He could never go out into the Sunlight where the Girl of the Story danced, for he was in chains—body in chains, soul in chains, only his heart free—and that only to a certain extent.

Life had been a Serial Story to him, one of those dull "To-be-continued-in-our-next," potboiling stories that begin well with promise of so much more, but instead go straggling on indefinitely—when one always knows the pre-destined "Finis" before one was through the third chapter.

And then suddenly, unexpectedly, he one day picked up a chapter of his life, to find that into it had come a dominant, vivid personality, holding in

her little hands the Wonderful Thing of which he had read in novels—or, without understanding, seen in human books.

He had seen it dimly as in a blurred glass when he had married people. He guessed then that the Wonderful Thing must have been present at the ceremony, for very, very often there was neither Beauty nor Money. He had known it also, in a dull sort of a way at funerals.

But it hadn't come into his life, although here and there a frayed thread may have fluttered brokenly across the woof of his existence, only to be lost in its predestined greyness.

But when this Wonderful Thing flung forth its radiance, the Gray turned to Gold . . . a wonderful, magical Gold that comes but once. And the Wonderful Thing is Love. Ah! Dearest, under the Gold lies still the Predestined Gray. Is it that, dear heart, that makes you and me—in our gladdest moments—sad?

Dear, if I could only put my arms around you now—to hold you—to grow old together—and arm in arm to walk the Earthways, sharing its joys—its sorrows!

If I could only run away with you to-night . . . out of this darkness that wraps even thought.

And then I hear Religion saying: "Not so. 'Tis thou who art in the Sunlight. . . . 'Tis she in the shadow. For the World counts for naught beside the Faith of the Church."

Beloved! Love and Religion are the two greatest Philosophers of the Earth-World.

LOVE LETTERS OF A PRIEST.

Which is the greater?

Which is the Handmaid of the Lord?

And when the Loom of our Life is silenced and the Pattern finished, shall we find the garment a Cloak of Divinity—a Threadbare Rag—or a Shroud?

When Life answers that, Dearest, it has answered all.

. . . Why I have written you like this I hardly understand. Some of your mystical phrases seem to have set me thinking . . . and evolving, and I am going to end this now . . . abruptly . . . sending you as I always send you, my love and blessing . . . to wish you, in your own wording, "Dieu vous garde." I would send you also . . . as you desired . . . my thoughts . . . to-night I cannot . . . for to-night I dare not think.

Dieu vous garde.

Extract from a Later Letter



Creeds! . . . What are creeds?

Why will you ask me questions like these, Gillema Chree?

O, I could answer it through the medium of the Church, through a hundred philosophers, through even the medium of a Twelfth of July orator. But—it doesn't bring us any nearer to what the meaning of creed is to us.

You and I talk a great deal—and think more I'm afraid about religion—than we should, or than we are allowed.

But the World from the Beginning as it shall to the End, will ask I suppose the Eternal Question. Neither you nor I can bring the answer nearer.

Let it be sufficient that at the end must be a common meeting-place. . . . (How surprised certain factions will be to see each other there.) So many shut their eyes to the fact that Religion, like the World, is a Vast Circle, and that it is the Life

within each miniature circle that counts. Mind you, I'm not on the altar now.

But some get on to the high road of Life and protest loudly to those in the bypaths that theirs is the only way.

I can describe it by taking a local example.

You know that road that leads to Farmer ——'s. There's many a short cut that the pedestrian, who walks alone, can take through the alternate Shadow and Sunlight of the bush.

He on the Highroad will give the clarion warning that many have been lost in the bush (but many also have been bogged on the Highroad). Then there's the Hill of Experience, around which all roads wind. It has notice-boards all over it that anyone trespassing will be prosecuted . . . if caught.

There are many roads—and many of those thereon have the wrong labels on the signposts, for as many, or more, reasons.

But the same blue sky looks down on them all. . . . At Benediction next Sunday night I shall point out to the congregation . . . and you . . . that there is "but one True Church," and you must forget . . . that you were ever told otherwise; . . . you must not think otherwise. Better to be a bad Catholic than no Catholic at all doesn't apply to religion only.

From Another Letter



So we will play "Once upon a time." We'll wring a little quiet happiness out of life, Sweetheart. . . . I'll be the Jealous Husband (and he can be jealous as you know), and when I drive home in the rain and wet, with the mud up to the axles, I'll picture the Little Wife who will be accidentally at the gate or window as I pass. There in passing—in having to pass with only a look, mean it ever so much—lies our unhappiness.

For the little wife must live in her guarded home, and the jealous husband in his red-brick prison half a mile away.

Do you remember the piece of poetry your sister quoted recently?—

"Between these two there rolls an ocean wide.

Yet, she is in the garret there with him,

And he is in the garden by her side."

There are so few meetings—a few minutes, and after vespers; a walk home in the gloaming, and seldom alone; a few visits per day to the house,

hardly, if ever, seeing you alone there; and there are all these bright, starlit nights wasted. . . .

Is the "Once upon a time" story to close then, that there was a Girl, who said she loved a Man who loved her very dearly; but with the Girl it could not have been love, for though she told him so, she avoided him a great deal, running away sometimes like a frightened child (when there was no need).

"Perfect Love casteth out all Fear." I must tell you all the rest in that some day when you will really love me, and make my lonely heart unlonely and happy.

Dear Little Woman . . . Little Wife . . .
Goodnight.

“St. ———’s,”
Wednesday.

Dear Little Wife,

Yes, I’ll be in to afternoon tea, and probably after vespers if you cannot get out.

Your mother is a firm guardian to all you girls, dearest. Fancy at your age, your not being allowed out without half the family in attendance, and with a moral certainty that she will be at the gate on your return, waiting for you. Mavourneen, it’s little indeed I’m seeing of you, every day indeed, but only for a handshake and a few words in front of others.

It was a lovely moonlight night last night, wasn’t it? Were you thinking of me, Little Wife, as I of you? The moonlight had lured nearly all the lovers in — up the road seemingly. I could hear them laughing and talking as they went past the Presbytery gate.

But the moonlight nights are not for us, Little Wife, are they?

In the few hurried moments we might snatch together, it would have to be dark, so that a poor priest would not be recognised by his flock, who do not realise that a heart can beat beneath a hair-shirt, as well as a citizen’s jacket.

Can you wonder in my love for you, Little Wife, that I grumble at Fate? The Dream Home is haunted with remorse lately, remorse for many things which your dear head must not worry about. Shall we not pass over the Threshold, dearest, and inhabit it for a brief space in our world of "Let's Pretend"? We are living so much in that world lately, that I often wonder if your love for me is real, or make-believe also . . . or if you would dare everything and anything.

Whenever I see those country louts clumsily paying you attentions, I have an insane desire to knock all their heads together, especially since you put your hair up and seemingly drifted further away from me. You must not drift any farther, little wife, come back again . . . and nearer . . . and dearer.

Now I wonder will you flutter away from this letter like you flutter away from me sometimes, like a little half-frightened bird?

Why frightened, dearest, if you care?

I can't get you to say you do, but you write it, . . . and yet you are not shy with others. I have seen you the life and soul of a party, and yet, when I come on the scene, you can hardly lift your eyes.

I often wonder . . . if Someone Else should come into your life; . . . but you wouldn't love them, Beloved, would you? You couldn't. You have written that in one of your letters. But you might change . . . but I won't think of that, only of

a poor old husband sitting lonely in his "Let's Pretend" House, . . . the little Dream Home, . . . and thinking of the cold, hard-hearted little wife who peers in the door,—and then runs away.

Yet in that home sorrows might be shared, troubles faced together, and joy and happiness, even though I am a priest with all that a man demands, refused me by a law that says "you are a priest for ever . . . you cannot marry openly."

But our Dream Home is not in any rule, Sweet-heart, at least not in our sense of it. . . .

My dear little wife, Love and Life are beautiful things, and Time goes so swiftly.

Well, I shall see you to-day, and I hope this evening. . . .

Don't flutter away any more. Little Bird.

What are you thinking of, little wife, all this time? Three whole days since I heard from you, . . . since I left "——."

Are you waiting until my return, or didn't you think it wise to write here?

Father ——, from C——, was over here also for the Forty Hours Adoration. He was asking after you. Said he remembered you last as a little toddler; and I told him you were quite a grown up woman now, and quite a personage in your way; and he asked me when I returned to send his kindest regards to his "little friend of old," and hoped he would hear from you some day. Father ——, of ——, was also here, drinking heavily as usual. You will just have time to drop me a line before my return, so do so, dearest.

Little wife, all my heart goes out to you to-night! Barely fifty miles away; yet it seems a whole continent in distance. . . .

Goodnight, dearest.

"Dominus Vobiscum,"

Your loving "———."

Another Letter



St————'s Presbytery,
————.

I feel so lonely that I must write to you, although it is only an hour since I saw you.

I wonder if you will ever know what it is to be lonely, Little Wife, to feel that everything is black around you, no light, nothing to help? God grant you never shall. The whole place gets on my nerves . . . sometimes. This gloomy presbytery is part of it all. Father —— goes often a whole day without speaking lately, since —— died. There is only one thing the Presbytery holds in which we have a taste in common, and that is the wine-cellar. Now, don't write me a lecturing letter, and don't take that statement too literally. I only want to explain the difference between your home of brightness and laughter, and this.

Imagine an oil lamp almost empty, flickering on the hall table, an asthmatic housekeeper asleep in the back regions, and the house apparently deserted, and I, tossing sleeplessly for hours, then to wake to the ghastly routine of things. . . . O, little girl, don't give me your love grudgingly; a lonely man

needs all you can give; he needs you, you, and the "Let's Pretend" Home made real, but—he mustn't think of it.

If he remembers all the vows he took when a boy—a mere schoolboy—he will tear this letter to fragments, but instead he will probably post it and, going past your house, mutter a blessing over the dear one no doubt now sound asleep. O, I'm sick of everything to-night, Little Wife, sick of the farce of things, this hollow trumpery show we call Life. . . . I wonder why we are brought into this world, . . . what the beginning . . . and what the end. . . .

Beloved, when you read this letter to-morrow, in the morning sunshine, will you realise it was black, bitter night when I wrote it? God forbid! You will not realise the black, bitter Night in my soul.

Another Letter



I might have known what you would do, Beloved. So you made the scapulars an excuse, and came up to see me. Dearest, I think among the few holy memories I hold in my life, I shall shrine all you said to me then.

It mattered not that the night had passed, and with it the mood of rebellion—or was it insight? (Dear, burn all these letters I write you.) . . .

But the morning came, that cold, gray breaking of the day of indifference—days in which one drifts without effort of thought.

I wonder if the nights of Retrospection come oftener when one gets older. Let's hope not!

But we'll only think of you now, dearest. Come to me this evening after vespers.

“_____.”

St. _____'s,"
_____.

Dear,

I have just received your note. Yes, I was very much annoyed with your Aunt practically closing the door in my face. She was absolutely rude to me when I asked for you, and said: "I consider your visits to my niece 'on account of the Sodality' is only pretence. I don't thank you for calling on her." It flustered me with the surprise of it all, and, when I managed to ask her what she meant, she hinted darkly that "everybody, even the post-boys, were talking," and . . . closed the door. One could never imagine she had ever been a Roman Catholic, but then, curiously enough, an ex-Roman Catholic is more bitter than an Orangeman towards the priesthood.

In your note you say that the Irish Doctor teased you, and asked you "How often does His Nibs come to see you?" People must be talking again then. . . . I suppose they know of every letter that goes through that confounded post-office. That is the worst of the country, everybody knows his or her neighbour's business, and invents what they don't know.

I hope nobody says anything to Father —— about it. Not that he's a saint, but he dreads scandal

after that affair of Father —— and the school teacher. Anyhow you are not to carry out your foolish letter . . . as if things could end now, . . . but I must be more careful. It would never do for me to be talked about, exceptionally anyhow, . . . and don't write any more about ending it. I thought all those romantic notions were passed. Am not I more to you than a pack of country gossips who would talk in any case? I care for you so infinitely well that to you nothing else should matter. . . . Only you know how very much I care. . . .

St. _____'s Presbytery,
_____.

Try to help me, dearest. You don't know how miserable I am over it all. You think I am heartless, but, dearest, I can't act otherwise than I am doing.

You write to me as if I were not tied irrevocably. You say I forgot that for a time, I know, dear, but remembrance had to come afterwards.

Men make promises swayed by passion, and love after all is so much different to your conception of it. When you are older you will realise it has less if any of the Divine, and belongs to this earth of which we are made.

You speak of God and a Sacrament in His sight, but, dearest, I was vowed to God, my life consecrated to him, before I met you. And by the laws of our Church I must abide by that vow.

Dearest, don't repeat promises I have made under such circumstances. All that I can give you I will, all I can do for you I will do, but a priest has limitations.

I can't go to you openly, as if I were free I would. I can't say: "This is the woman I have chosen out of all the world." And what would marriage do,

dearest, in our case; even if it were possible, which it is not?

You would not be any more legally married to me than you are now. The Church has a harsh title in that case for the woman. . . . It would not legitimize a child, and you would be pointed at with scorn by all women, excommunicated from the Church and outcast from its Sacraments.

I love you dear, you know that, and I know that you love me. In the proving of it has come sorrow, that we neither of us anticipated. But everything will come right if you will do what I asked of you last night. Only don't make me unhappy by useless reproaches. It will only assail and break down the love between us.

Some day in the near future, when I am right away from here, things will be different. I will make up to you for everything. After all, dear, it is only a question of a little while.

For the sake of these few weeks I ask you if you are going to create a scandal for me, see me shamed and disgraced here, yourself outcast for ever. For me it would simply mean a transfer to another parish, and even in exceptional cases, just being sent to another State.

The world has long memories where women are concerned. It has only a benediction for the man.

It is very late, dear, and I am very tired, and unhappy after receiving your letter. Be more gentle and forgiving to your loving ———.

[There are several letters, and many notes prior to and after this letter, not for publication.]

St. ———'s Presbytery,
————.

My Dear —,

I must say that you last letters have caused me a great amount of pain and worry. I never thought it possible after what has been that you would ever write like you did. Of course I understand that you have not been well lately, and therefore not yourself, but I think you should consider my feelings a little. Life is hard enough to bear in this hole of a place without any additional worry. The heat has been intense the last few days, with blinding duststorms, and altogether the whole place gets on my nerves. I hope, and think, I will be transferred shortly.

Father — was telling me that, very probably, he will be sent to S——, where he once was. We priests seldom if ever get left in a place more than three years. Of course, as I told you before, I have been offered the position of — at St. ——'s Cathedral, at —, but you know the reasons I would rather my own parish.

By the way, that gossipy dressmaker informed me with her usual smirk that there were some rumours current about your leaving the district so suddenly. I felt a bit uncomfortable, though I passed

the matter off alright and then dismissed the subject of you. I'll hear all the rest of it in the Confessional.

Personally I haven't heard anything, so don't worry, dear, for I don't think anyone has any definite idea, so I don't see why you should worry so much. I would like to know who tells you the yarns about my drinking and gambling, also about my continually going over to see Mrs. ——. There's no truth in it. The fact is, she has been drinking heavily again, and, being my parishioner, of course I had to go and see her, although as you say Father —— should have done so, but you know very well that he never did visit, except in exceptional circumstances. He finds far more interest in the sound of a cork being drawn and a mixed foursome than in listening to his parishioners' complaints. As for Mrs. —— and my name being coupled with hers, you never allowed me to explain that incident shortly before you left ——. She was on a drinking bout, as you knew, and quite by accident I happened to be there, and you came in. I was just taking one glass of whisky because I felt faint, and in you walked. I shall never forget your cruel letter over it, and now when I thought you had believed me, and forgotten what was not worth remembering, you write all these things that someone told you. I wish I could find out who it was. I am afraid you are allowing people to poison your mind against me, and so I hope you will write and assure me that I am mistaken in thinking that.

Now, dear ——, I trust that whatever happens

you will still remain my friend. If you only knew how often and how much I think of you, you would not worry, and make me unhappy. Of course I know you are already regretting the bitter, reproachful words you wrote on the impulse of the moment. I have been thinking seriously over things, and I want you, dear, to look at the matter in the only light it can be looked at now. We must both regard it, thinking always of the Holy Church, as a mad infatuation which is over, with all the foolish, impossible promises one makes in such moments, but love, more clear-sighted and steadfast, will, I assure you, remain. No one else will ever be to me what you have been, and I have told you how deeply and sincerely I do care. Neither of us ever thought of the possibility of this phase. . . .

It seems to me therefore so foolish of you to be jealous of anyone else, just because some idiot, probably that Mrs. —, writes you a whole pack of lies, especially about my being drunk at the St. Patrick's Sports and the Ball. The idea of anyone saying I had to be carried home. I admit I wasn't very well that day, but I can't help what people say. Of course I know it was Mrs. —. She is a Protestant, and they will say anything about a priest. I know you look on her as your best friend; but I don't, though no doubt she helped matters lately. I hope you have not told her anything. I mean about mentioning my name in the matter. Remember, whatever happens, you promised me that faithfully.

So you went to Dr. —. I felt very upset when

I read your account of the interview, and it has been haunting me the last few days, so that I could not write before. You say that I do not seem to understand how you feel about it. Well, —, you know how I hate to be worried in my present state of health, yet you seemed to write as if I were not in sympathy with your suffering. Have I not done everything possible; and I remember you always in the Sacrifice of the Mass, and at Benediction.

Believe me, with love,

Yours as always,

“_____.”

P.S.—Be the dear little friend of old, the girl I dearly loved, and still love. Things are different now, and I want you, dearest, to look at the matter in the only light it can be looked at. I cannot understand this new bitterness, that is so foreign to your nature, nor your many moods of late. You must realise what we both forgot for a time, that I am bound to the Church, and our ways are fated to lie apart, but I shall never forget you.

Letter



Dearest,

If I wrote you a hundred letters, I could not put into them more than I said last night in our short interview.

Dearest, all my heart is yours, all the rest of my life save that physical shell of myself that the Church holds in bondage.

I wish you knew all the thoughts surging in my heart to-night, but I cannot tell them. I can only ask you to forgive me for coming into your life. I never thought I could hurt you . . . but now, dearest, will you not help me to do what is best. you say your heart and brain ache so much that you can no longer think coherently—leave all then in my hands as far as possible. I too am suffering because of your suffering. Will you not believe that? You say I appear hard. . . .

Do you know, dear, how unanswerable your letters are becoming. You say you feel changed, as if you were a stranger standing afar off and watching yourself suffer. I cannot follow you in such flights of imagination. I only know that this thing hangs over me like a drawn sword, and that all your old tenderness and sympathy for me seem gone.

Once you loved me, . . . but now I do not know what to think. Your letters are so full of reproaches, and last night you told me that you did not believe I ever loved you. Of course your words can be explained . . . ; Dear, I beg of you to make these last few days before you go happier ones, leaving us each with nothing to regret. I love you as I always did, and it is not I but the Church who sets limitations. You are the most unselfish woman I have known, the dearest, truest friend, and when this mood passes, I trust you will be that old dear self once more. In the enforced absence between us my heart will go out more surely to you. Will not that comfort you?

In the meantime I think I will write "Patience" on a card for you to always keep before your eyes.

As always,

"———."

Extracts from Letter



“———,”

Friday evening.

. . . Even the wisest of us all make mistakes. I don't want you to think me hard—or less loving, but it never came to me what my duties really were until recently. As for caring for you, I shall always—always. You built up such an ideal of me that for a time it really existed.

In years to come we will look back on this—even though thought is forbidden, and remembering, know that your loving heart was staunch and loyal to the Church. You think me hard—you said cruel—but it is not so, only I cannot help myself—dearest, I cannot. When I was studying for the priesthood at —— college, and when I had taken my final vows, I never thought that love would enter my life. It had no place there. You have heard things of me I know—they are said about most priests—but I tell you solemnly, dear, that I have never truly cared for any woman until you came straight into my heart. . . .

So I ask this of you now, for the sake of that love, and above all for the Church, to do as I advise—

the only thing now to do . . . I cannot write now, but when you have gone away, I shall write and explain everything. Later I shall come down, and we will talk over things. Father —— has asked me to see him to-night after Benediction, and I suppose the interview is over you, but nobody else knows.

I wish I could tell you all the thoughts that are in my mind to-night—but I cannot. Only all I can say is that I know, remembering the Church, that you will do everything for the best. So many things divide us. I wish I could tell you—who knows, some day I may. This will be only a temporary parting. Don't think my letter hard, dear, because of the pressure under which I was writing, but all my world seemed to have suddenly tumbled around my ears. On one side of the shaky bridge on which I stand is safety—on the other, an abyss of whose depths I do not know. It lies in your hands—by your silence—your dear loyalty—what future remains for me. Dearest, forgive me for being no more than I am. . . .

(The rest of this letter not for publication.)

Letter



Little girl, you don't know how hard it is for me. I know you have been brave and unselfish. You have said you would do anything I desired, believing it right. Therefore, dearest, you will try and help me now, won't you? not to what we desire, but to what we ought best to do. We must both look at the future as well as at the present. This time next year, even if matters come to the worst, that which is troubling us now will have passed into the world of forgotten things. The world will for us go on as before. It just needs a little thought on your part. I want you to be your old unselfish self. You have said so often that you would do anything I desired, and I desire silence of you—your dear loyal silence. Couldn't you tell your brother something . . . anything, to allay his suspicions? He came to see me yesterday—as a parishioner—and showed me an anonymous note he had received, of course that confounded Mrs. ———, or one of her sisters wrote it (one always knows on whom to place the blame of anonymous letters in ———), and to think of it from these people who couldn't

gather up a shred of decent reputation among them if they tried. I feel sick when I think of them, posing all the week as dictators of conduct, and on Sunday as Saints, and all the while with malicious tongues and pen, causing more misery, misunderstanding and unhappiness than their shallow brains can ever know. I could tell you a few things about these same saints that would open your eyes . . . but all this is a side issue from the main question.

I told your brother to put the anonymous communication and all his awakened suspicions into the fire. We talked of you for nearly an hour . . . it seemed eternity. He said he couldn't make out what was coming over you lately . . . you seemed so different . . . and losing all the old, happy, carelessness that characterised you. He asked me to tell him if you had said anything to me. I said there was nothing to say, but I don't think I said it well. I could see there was something on his mind, and at last as he was leaving it came out. He didn't look at me as he spoke, but said that there were some rumours about that you and I had been seen walking together after dark over the common and along the Church road. I told him with priestly indignation that there was no truth in it.

He then said that he had asked you just before coming to see me, and you also denied it, as well as the rumours that I had followed you home from a ball, and in front of a parishioner, had broken forth into a storm of jealous abuse. He said he could not believe it, either of you or of me!

I asked him if it were likely a priest would do these things, and he had answered that if the rumours were untrue, they should be suppressed at once. I promised I would see to it, and there the interview ended.

I must see you, but you will have to be very careful. Your brother is going away on business on Friday, so we'll have to leave it until then. In the meantime I will try to arrange matters we are discussing.

Cheer up, dear, and remember your promises.

Extract from Letter



The laws of the Church are unnatural, . . . and if I were right to break from them, as I think sometimes, what would happen afterwards?

Sometimes I feel I would give anything to break away from a life distasteful to me in some respects; then I picture those men who have left. You mention some of them brave enough to leave.

Brave indeed! There is —, once Superior of the biggest monastery out here. He had everything he desired, and more, yet he left and married, by civil laws, the woman who had been the cause of him giving everything up.

He put Love before all else, and where is he now? Starving, unrecognised, hated by the Church, in some obscure corner of Australia, with a delicate wife (the Church would say “concubine”), dying of consumption.

He will probably go back to the Church again. The world has no place for an ex-monk or ex-priest, and they come back in the end, starving. It all shows the futility of leaving. What could I do out in the world? It was easy for us to discuss ways and means in our world of “Let’s Pretend,” but

face to face with the grim reality, one sees differently.

I am not strong, and I can't see any helpful ray of light from that future. So you see, dear, I must remain in the priesthood at all costs.

This time next year you will look at matters in a different light. You will see then how much you were asking me to give up, for that which could only make you and me more miserable than now.

. As it is nothing can prevent our loving each other, a love that will deepen because of your sacrifice, such a little sacrifice, dearest, when all is said and done. So many women, millions of women, have gladly made any sacrifice of their own feelings, for the man they loved.

You said once you would have laid down your life if it could help me in anyway, and now when I ask you for those few months that will be afterwards relegated to oblivion, you cry out that I am hard and selfish. It is only because you are thinking what a handful of country people would say if they knew. And it won't be found out. It can be so easily arranged, I assure you, and, dearest, remember that though I am the man who loves you, I am also a priest. A PRIEST; nothing can alter that.

“St. _____’s,”
_____.

My Dear ——,

I do wish that you would show a little more consideration for my feelings. You know it is quite impossible for me to do the thing you ask. How can I? Put yourself in my place for a moment, and see the impossibility of what you suggest. If I even went to see you just now, that would surely confirm certain rumours that this gossip town seems to be circulating lately. As it is, I have been given a warning by Father —— that if the rumours reach the Bishop’s ears, it will greatly interfere with my advancement in transference.

I am sick of this place, and I think I will be shifted next month, for which I won’t be sorry.

Why do you keep reiterating promises I made once? I can’t keep them, you know that now, anyhow. It’s all over and done with now.

I’ll do anything I possibly can, and if I were free of course I’d marry you. But I’m not free. Surely you don’t wish to compromise me in any way? Your letter reached me Saturday afternoon late, just when I was tired out with hearing confessions. It upset me so that it kept me awake all night. And yet you say I seem to have no feeling. I beg of you if you have any love left for me, not

to reproach me with reference to what is past and over.

Recrimination can do no good. I say now, as I said then, that a marriage in the sight of God was in our particular case more binding than any law could make it. The tie that binds you to me is a holy one. I will keep, as far as a priest can, every vow I made you, and once I leave this town things will be better for us both no doubt.

With love from ———.



HER APPEAL





Letter to the Reverend Father —



St. —————'s Presbytery,
—————.

Dear —,

I can't go on like this any longer. I can't. I am tired of it all—the years of deception, the slow heart-break of them, and this last bitterest year of them all.

I hate this place, this great, gray, cheerless city, where everyone is a stranger. My heart sickens to go back to — and see all my dear ones again.

And I can never go back if you so decree.

There lies the tragedy of it all. I have tried to put the past out of my life, to remember that I am destined now to wander a pariah on the face of the earth. For I am beginning to realise what your promises are worth. All the long days of this last year, in which my heart has broken slowly, torn with the anguish of hope deferred, you have been promising—making vows—that if you ever intend to keep you will surely keep now. Do you ever think of

what I have given up—Home, Friends, Honour, Name? I think of it all in the long, sleepless nights that come so often now. I forget then the loneliness; that I am many hundreds of miles away from ———, and I see the fields as they are now, green on the hillside, the plough-furrowed valley of ———, the low, blue hills in the far distance, and—home. But I dare not think of home—I dare not think of my Mother's face as I last saw it. All I carry with me, that I shall carry to my grave, is her proud head bowed in the bitterest hour that can come to a mother.

And the dear Dad, . . . but I can't write of it. . . . I only thank God when I look back that I went away without a word. You say everything seems to be the same. Ah, but I know. There are hours in a home when the door is barred for the night against strangers, that the mask falls. I know that hour in all its bitterness, in all its heart-break, comes to that old home of mine. I didn't need my brother's bitter letter to tell me that my father is failing fast, that my mother has changed beyond all recognition. I don't need to be told that where once was laughter and happiness, there reigns now the silence of shame. You think that the townspeople do not know—my brother knows, for some of them told him. On him, and on his, all the shame falls. The Catholics are tearing me to shreds, while they sit in St. ———'s and watch you reverently on the altar.

For me—bitter eating shame, the lash of tongues,

bitter as only a Roman Catholic's can be. For you, the hushed scandal, the word of praise—just a hint of transfer. “——” has not told the Dear Dad, or the Little Mother, and they have never asked. And in their not asking I read their fear of knowing what they suspect is true. And the little children I played with . . . oh, until I came to this big friendless city, I too was but a child with no knowledge of what life held. Now I know.

Late last night, I looked down on the city street, almost deserted then, save for the poor creatures who come with the nightfall. Poor Daughters of Night! When I, scarce believing, first heard of them, I had shuddered with horror and disgust, and rebellion of life's stagnant Undercurrent. Now I look down and see, not as then a Spirit of Evil, driving them onwards, but little hands clutching at a mother's breast, some little life that had to be kept and shielded at whatever cost. O, I wonder does God see, as I, down beneath the poor, painted face into the broken heart beneath—a heart that has long since given up the last hope to which all deserted women cling.

You have spoken so often of a “marriage in the sight of God, of our holy alliance. Last night, looking down into the dark, wet street beneath, I asked myself if those poor creatures had been told that also. I feel to-day I cannot bear it any longer. “——,” I ask you for the sake of the sacred vows you once made, all the promises that in the name of God you made me—I ask you for the sake of

a desolate home, for the love you once bore me, not to forsake me. I too, in spite of all, would drift into that bitter Lethe, out of which no women again may rise.

“_____.”

St. ———'s Presbytery.

Dear ——,

You make it increasingly difficult for me to write to you. I want to be fair to you, to myself, and above all to the Power above and beyond us both, to which we both owe allegiance. You make it difficult because your point of view is so fixed, unalterable, and so impossible. You see only one point of view, your own. Forgive me saying it, but you are not treating me quite fairly. Weak I may be; bad I may be. You can call me anything you like. I only ask you to stop seeing only your side of it only for one minute, and to hear optimistically what I have to say.

Your last letter was like a cry. It rang in my ears all night. Even when I was asleep I seemed to hear it. It hurt you to write, I daresay, but don't you think, won't you think for a minute, how much more it hurt me to receive? Do you want to torture me? If you do, well, you know the way. But I can't believe you would do it. Surely after what we have been to each other, after what you were to me, and still are, we owe it to each other not to try wilfully to torment each other. God is my witness, there is nothing I would not do for you, short of the one thing that is now impossible. Yes, impossible. I know—I know there were moments

of delirium when I said it was possible, when Life itself, Eternity itself, the Church itself, were less than you, and your slightest wish. The knowledge that it can never be, hurts me deeply, but the path of duty lies before us both, clear and cold and cheerless now, but leading—let us believe—to some ultimate goal of content, or at least of forgetfulness, where our two spirits will meet and greet each other, with every trace outworn of what now hurts and hampers us and breaks us both.

If you ever loved me at all, will you help me in this? Help me to follow the path which I have to tread. It isn't much to ask, in the light of Eternity, that you should do this; because all I want is that you should refrain from this constant reproaching, which cannot alter my purpose, but only embitter my heart against you. Think for one moment, dear. You are young; there is so much in front of you. Can't you look upon what has been as a memory not wholly unpleasant—as something you can be glad has happened—as something that made life better while it lasted, and that, if only for that reason, you are not going to regret? Better a million times that our love should end—like this—in parting, over which memory still lingers, than that it should be killed slowly, suffocated by the weight of circumstances, by prosaic and hateful realities, by the thousand and one things that drag love down to its death.

Do not say that the Bishop speaks through the medium of my letters.

Forgive me, dearest, for ever writing to you from

a worldly point of view, as if there were nothing beyond—as if our lives ended here. But do they? We know the Infinite lies around us, and is waiting for us. What we go through here is nothing. Shut your eyes and ten years have gone. Shut them again, and we are on the threshold of Eternity. Open them, and we are in it. We pass away, but Love and Faith endure. No, don't say this is hypocrisy. If you have made me forget the Church, break my vows to it, that doesn't say I am an outcast from it for ever. It has never yet refused to take back a penitent priest, whatever that priest did. Would you have me turned from its doors as a Renegade, an Apostate? You can't really; you would not want the name of the man you loved made a by-word. If you do, your love could only be a selfish thing.

I have written you a long letter. If it could make you feel as I want you to feel—resolute for the future, not wretched because of the past—I think I should be very nearly content.

Your more hopeful

St. ———'s Presbytery.

My dear —,

I have not answered your last two letters, because I could not see any definite good in so doing. I am sorry you are so ill, and hope to be down during the week. Of course, with this confounded under-current of gossip here, I have to be careful. But I will come down, although how it is going to help I don't know, considering I won't be able to see you.

Hadn't I better wait for a few weeks. Now don't be getting such foolish notions in your head. What would be parting us? . . . and of course I'd let you know if I contemplated such a thing. You say my letters have grown strangely cold. My dear, you must remember where you are, and the attendant circumstances, and how unwise it would be to have letters lying around. I shall make up for it later, believe me. Look on the bright side of things, and be more optimistic as regards everything. There's always a way out of every difficulty. Yes, I am being transferred shortly, only up the line a bit, to —. It is a hole of a place as you know, but I think the change will be only temporary. Goodbye, dearest, for the time being. You know

I will be thinking of you all the time, but I would wait for just a while, if I were you, before writing again. You never know into whose hands letters that are not posted by yourself may fall.

With love always from

St. ———'s Presbytery.

For God's sake, if not for my sake, or your own, or anyone dearer to you, do not contemplate such an action. Wait until I see you ——. I will be in town in a week or so again. I did call, several times, but could not see you.

I have seen —, and he will bring you messages I cannot entrust by post since your last letter. I am very ill and upset over your letter.

You said you loved me, and this is how you prove your love, by talking of putting the matter in — hands. I did not answer your letter because of my illness. It was not evasion. Did not — wire that delay was through illness?

Dearest, do as — suggests. I cannot come down to see you until you do withdraw all contemplation of such a thing.

For God's sake, if not for mine, wait until I see you. . . .

P.S.—I shall explain all when I reach the city.

“———,” U.S.A.

My dear little friend,

No doubt you will be surprised to hear from me, from this side of the world. I meant to write and tell you at the time it was decided I should go, but thought it might upset you.

I always remember you in the Mass, dear ——, and pray for you, as I hope you still will do for me. . . .

The only thing I could do was to go away, if only for a year or so, believing it the best step in the interests of both of us. You will forget me and be happy. Life has so many openings for you, and your health will improve when summer comes. One can never take much notice of what doctors say.

I had promised —— I should not write to, or see you again, but I wanted to assure you of my friendship, and sincere regard and interest always in your welfare, not from fear, as you might be led to think. You know now you could do no harm. I do not know if ever I shall come back to Australia. I may be away a year or years, but I will come to see you as soon as I return. I am only staying at this place a night. It is hotter than ——, the town I last had, and Australia seems very far away. This

is however very pretty. I enclose a postcard of it. I am not certain as to where I shall go from here. It may be Japan, Ireland or Alaska. You have made it very hard for me to return, but some day of course I shall come back, when I trust I shall find you well and happy, and still my dear friend as of old.

In the meantime, be good, dear old friend, and always retain a kind thought and word for me. You will soon forget all that is gone and over.

It was so foolish of you to send me that lawyer's letter, but I forgive you now. Of course I knew, although it upset me very much at the time, that you would regret your action. I know by now you are sorry, and freely forgive you. Legally, of course, you could have no claim on me, as a priest. You could have done me no harm in any case, and have only made your name ring in shame from one end of the Commonwealth to the other, and be pointed at with scorn for throwing mud at a Church, which is the most powerful in Australia.

Goodbye, and be the dear, unselfish friend you used to be. I am not to write to you, but doubtless you will hear from me now and again in the future, when all the bitterness has gone from your heart.

I shall be travelling until my money fails, then enter some diocese over here. Possibly may return to Australia later, when, if you are your old unselfish self again I will come and see you.

Until then,

Yours,

St. ———'s.

It must end. You don't care about the sort of letter I wrote you last time, and I can't write otherwise now. What is the use of writing in any case?

Because we both loved, and because Nature ordained that you should suffer—mentally and physically—you are unreasonably bitter against me. But you ought to remember . . . You were not a child altogether. Surely you knew—some things.

I don't want to write like this, but you drive me to it when you talk as though I, and I alone, were to blame. As if I had plotted to injure you; as if I would not have saved you if I could! At first, perhaps—but what is the use of harping on that now? The past is over and nothing can alter it. We must face the future, difficult as it may be for both of us, for me as well as for you. It is of your own making that the ways lie so far apart.

You write in this last letter as if you had a monopoly of all the feelings in the world. Other women have endured much for love, and—you say you love me. Do you think I am so blind, so dull, so insensate that I have not suffered also? Is it nothing to find that faith you once gave me taken away? To be accused of treachery, deceit, broken faith and I know not what besides? I ask you again,

—, is it right? is it fair? I am a priest. It is too late to alter that fact, and you know I would have married you if I had been free. There was a time when I forgot I was not free I know. I have told you that before, and I tell you again. I am not free. Would it please you—would it make things easier for you—to know that for you I had broken the Vows of the Church, abandoned the only profession for which I am fitted, stamped myself with the brand of the Apostate, lost my hopes of preferment in this world and the next, to end at last perhaps in the very gutter. That is really what you are asking me to do. I say again, I cannot do it; and if you loved me even a little, if you ever loved me, you would not ask it. You say you love me. Can you not prove it? You say that you have “suffered until you can endure no more.” Well, nothing I could do, even to taking the extremest step, could bring back the past. The thing is over and done. It is irrevocable. All that remains to both of us now is to make the best of things.

I know that nothing I can say makes much difference to you now. The time for convincing you has gone by. What use then for anything but silence?

Your friend—if you will let me be,—

“_____.”

P.S.—You may find some solace in this fact, that your otherwise futile letter of appeal to — will probably result in my temporary banishment to

some obscure hole for a while, and that I am forbidden to communicate with you in any way.

Why did you write to him? You might have known what an effect appeal would have there; better indeed had you done as I desired.

Now I will never be able to rise to any position greater than that of a —, and therefore that cripples me in anything I might have done for you. Dear little friend of old, be still a friend. It is so unlike you to be selfish and bitter. You always did as I desired you in the past; cannot you follow me in this? This is not a time for bitterness between us. Considering everything . . . I ask you to believe I will still be . . . as always.



LETTERS FROM HER





A Year Later



And so this is the end! and you have gone back entirely to that which you once called a ghastly farce.

And I? O, I cannot play the hypocrite. I cannot enter a church that turns deaf ears to the women who suffer through her priests, and shields only the priest, no matter if he be the lowest blackguard in the world. For it is so. Your case and mine is only one of many tragedies as you know.

You do not stand out as unique in this respect. One hears of it everywhere, but I never thought the time would come when that love which was to uplift us both would have been dragged in the mire, as you have dragged it.

You use the Church as a shield, one so transparent however that I can see you cowering behind it, as you are, a sorry thing for one's contempt even—and pity.

But I give you pity. You need it. Don't send your useless protestations of prayer for me. What can the Sacrifice of the Mass mean to a woman who has suffered, but only a great Ghastly Mockery, and a Sacrilege in the name of the Man of Sorrows. You

say you "will walk in His path." Poor Saviour of the World! that so much wrong, debauchery, and crime should be committed—so many lives ruined—so many hearts broken, in His name. . . . O, the Church needs indeed the Hell of which she preaches, but it will not be filled with those poor superstition-saturated souls who would give of their last penny for the building of Convents and Cathedrals, and the upkeep of their priests and nuns.

It will be filled with men like you—men who have taken some poor young life, and tortured it, and then thrown it carelessly away on Life's Scrap Heap.

Of myself and my future I will not speak. I drift apathetically on whatever current awaits me. Only one thing has power to restrain, and that you turn unrecognising eyes from . . .

But some day in the future, long after I am gone, perhaps you will see in another's eyes the light that was once in mine, and be filled with remorse that will come too late. There may come the day when, sick at heart as you have so often been, you turn and find no comfort. You will drink a little more, gamble a little more—ruin some more lives perhaps? For you did not ruin mine alone. I know that—all too late.

How can you stand now on the altar preaching of Love and Hope and Divine Goodness?

How can you christen a little child without thinking of all that is over?

How can you look down into the pure eyes of a Child of Mary without remembering one Child of

Mary, whose bowed head is now covered with the Veil of Shame—her white robes of innocence blackened by you—her soul desecrated and stained?

O, you cannot tell me that the God of all human creatures will, listening to your prayers, forget what has been.

You have done many cruel things to clear from yourself the blame. I saw an ingratiating letter you wrote to a friend of mine recently. I have it still, and underneath it this telling comment, which I have leave to send you.

“No wonder so many Roman Catholics leave nowadays. I always thought this priest a cur . . . He is not fit to wipe your boots. . . . Put him out of your life entirely. . . . I would like to have him here for five minutes, but I have written him my opinion. . . .”

To-day you will be on the altar. I can see you as plainly as if in a vision, standing there in your white surplice, offering up “the Sacrifice of the Mass” and everyone in the congregation looking up at you reverently, craving your blessing.

Your blessing . . . O God! . . .

And perhaps in the near future some girl in that parish will suffer through you, as I and others have suffered.

Go your way unafraid of me. All my life in connection with you has been one long road, dotted with the Milestones of Sacrifices. I gave you everything, made every sacrifice. They lie there at your

altar whenever you shall celebrate Mass; they lie there in broken fragments that nothing this side of the grave can ever mend—Faith torn from its white throne—a girl's young life—a broken heart—Love—Hope—and there too a desolated home—and a little child's white soul.

I have given you all I had to give.

For me the world holds nothing now, . . . and I too am as nothing.

Priest's Letter



You have been very ill, they tell me. I could not go to you, but believe that my thoughts at least were with you.

In that—all that I can say—is said.

I will not write that I find I cannot live without you, or that the Church holds and fills all my heart and life. You would not believe me now if I did.

To you either would be futile; but I think between the lines of this letter you will read all I would say and perhaps dimly understand the mood I am in, and the meaning behind it.

But I must never see you again. I was glad that, in all your illness, no word came from you that you desired to see me—and yet I wondered.

I must shut and bar even the Door of Thought against you.

This, however, I will confess. The process of eliminating you from my life has been slower than I anticipated, perhaps because in indirect ways I am always hearing of you.

One day, lately, I saw your portrait in a paper.

You were smiling—you looked happy, and yet they tell me who told me of your illness that you are never going to get better. Life seems very bitter sometimes—little if anything worth while. I tell you this that your heart may soften the bitterness you still bear towards me.

Yes, I have been back in Australia for some months.

Here in —— things are very different to what they were. It is a dumping-ground apparently for all priests “off the rails.” Each man, no doubt, carries his Hell with him.

When I ask you to be my friend, you will remember that, will you not?

You said once that I didn’t understand, and I say that you do not understand what parts us, and then in saying that I know that neither of us does.

It is not selfishness on my part, but inability to do otherwise, and Love not strong enough to give me strength. O, if I could only once see behind the meaning of Things.

Yes! I am mortgaged to the Church. I might say that in the Hour of Crisis between Her and You, she foreclosed.

That is the beginning—and the end of it—all there is of it.

No one but myself knows how good and unselfish you were, and really are—but nothing helps matters now.

I shall drift on my predestined current to the End of Things, hoping—yes, hoping I shall see Light

some day—knowing in the meantime the same earth holds us both.

Some cells in my heart must have withered and dried, for nothing matters very much, nothing counts for very much nowadays.

But I have done my duty to the Church.

And you? Yes, you are still the pivot of memory, when I remember. Here in — there are many ways of forgetting. . . .

Yet—sometimes—I wonder if I should come to you suddenly one day, in a moment's madness, and you, facing round, would see me standing at your door, what would happen? But I must not think of such a thing. Such things can not now be. I have surrendered to the Fate that has severed us so completely, that it has given me no way to come back to you.

If you still pray, pray then for one who sorely needs prayer, whose own lips sometimes refuse that office. . . .

I will try to do as you wish—that—and more—if it be possible.

But I must never see you again—yet . . . some day—who knows? We will not speak of this any more.

I ask your pardon for all that is past—to forgive enough to write that forgiveness to me—just once—telling me that I have not spoilt your life entirely.

For the sake of all that you were once to me, write that letter.

And—forget!

Only God knows what it is to me that I remember
. . . sometimes.

HER CONFESSION



“And unto you . . . I will tell all the thoughts of my heart. From you . . . I will hide nothing.”



Her Confession



I thank you for your letter of enquiry, anonymous though it was.

It has been as you say, a long silence. Yes—it has been very long, but I have striven to do as you and the Church desired, even though that Church has no longer power for me, and my Faith in Her is turned to contempt.

You say I do not understand. Indeed, I have understood for some time.

In these two long years since you and I parted definitely, it seems there has been no road of anguished suffering that I have not had to tread, and O those roads that blister—and burn—and sear.

I came by devious ways to the Garden of Gethsemane—ways of Bitterness—of Anger, Anguish, Despair, Atheism, that dully aching indifference of mind and body, that saps the body of vitality, and the Soul of Faith. There were other roads. O, I trod them all—and the only reason my heart did not break, is because it had broken on the day you deserted me, and the only reason my soul was not

more stained, because it could not be after you had damned it.

In the Darkened Garden of my Gethsemane I stayed a long time, groping blindly for a way out, striving to flee from the Sacrifice I must offer up on the desecrated Altar of Love, feeling all the while that all I loved slept on, unknowing and uncaring.

It was when I thought of One, deserted, betrayed by one He loved, denied on His hour of bitter need by the Founder of our great Roman Catholic Church, that I drank the bitter Wine of Anguish.

And the Church (whose Founder they acclaim as the first Pope), had given the Great Denial to Christ—that Church, I had so dearly loved, so depended on, had, in the bitterest hour a woman can know, not only condoned, but had commanded your denial and desertion, had endeavored to thrust me into the gutter, that you might be the more free.

In that Hour of Enlightenment I realised that the Roman Catholic Church followed not in the steps of Christ, but in that indeed of Peter—Peter who denied Christ.

Later, I met a nun, who also had passed through Gethsemane. Because of her, my heart has gone out to all nuns since, to all women who suffer.

In that half question of yours which for me stands out from your letter, “if I should ever come . . . ?” I answer it thus, the only way in which I could answer—“If ever the day comes when you come back to me, be you broken, maimed, blind, I would just hold out these poor hands of mine (so thin now)

and lift the haggard face from which illness has swept all beauty, and say two words, 'Welcome home.' " Would all the black, bitter unhappiness of the past, all the anguish, the corroding ache of the Present, O God, that lies throbbing under the outer glitter of my life, pass away as if it had never been? Only the God to whom I so often cry knows and He will not answer.

I send you this for remembrance—the little poem you quoted once to me, far away in a little town that has long forgotten me—a little town shrined in my heart, where Love and Evil first came to me, taught at the altar rails where I once knelt—

'Over the hills and far away
Beyond the utmost purple rim,
Throughout the night, throughout the day
Through all the world she followed him.

I can only sit as it were with folded hands until you come. On that day which may never be.

If that day never dawns I will still have in my heart the hope that you will—the hope that keeps my poor frail body to this earth, from which all that made Life sweet, has long since gone.

Sometimes my thoughts follow you, in all my perplexity and bewilderment, through the present intricate maze of your life.

Somewhere there is Light, and some day you will come to it. But you must find it alone. No one can help you, least of all the Church, whose hands are over your eyes.

If I have one prayer more than another, which I would that it reach God, it is this . . . that when that day of enlightenment comes, I shall still be here.

I cannot live your life for you. I have given up all that made Life for me in your interests. I carry a double burden in silence, that you might go free. And I have left you free as no other woman would have done, have bowed my head to the blame, praying that whatever you do, you will do it well, even though I have no faith in its object where the Church is concerned.

I want you to make something of that Life I cannot spend with you. Whether it end in Success, or Failure, believe always this that far away in the distance, but so near in spirit your hands might touch, standeth one woman, whose heart can never grow hard towards you. O, Beloved! If I leave this old Earth that I have so loved, where I would fain prolong my days because it holds all that I love, I do not think that any Heaven would suffice. I do not believe in a Hell for women—they have it here. I would always be looking earthward, striving to catch a glimpse of you. I know I would always be praying for you, so that my Heaven-songs would become discordant, and I would be forgetting all about the Golden Harp.

The chorus of white-robed angels would be as nothing to a far-off song floating down a moonlight night on earth—and you and I together. I would have nothing in common with the angels. Good

people, people that is, who wear a label of Virtue and throw their goodness at you, always bored me.

I always hated anyone who went down on their knees and prayed for me—every line of my body stiff and angry in resentment. (So many have prayed for me during this illness of mine.) I always feel it as a matter between only God and myself (the Church didn't teach me that, I know.)

My present religion is evidently taken as cosmopolitan. There's a kind-hearted Protestant parson who comes and prays really hard. Being in bed still I haven't to dissemble by getting on my knees. He is really a Christian, but it doesn't make me so. And then there's an equally kind-hearted priest, Father ——. He tells me I'm a heretic, but he says it quite cheerfully, and as if he were rather pleased than otherwise. Once he told me a story—a sad, sad story.

He says it gives him rheumatics to be always up on a Pedestal, and so we chat away on all topics, none, however, of which are to be found in the "Key of Heaven" or the "Garden of the Soul."

They are both likeable . . . and the only difference my maid finds between them is that when offered refreshments the parson takes water or tea, and the priest "a drop of the crather," and Scotch "crather" for preference. He takes too much sometimes, I hear, but then what priest does not.

I have been reading over some of your letters during this last illness of mine. What bundles we used to write each other.

You did not want me to keep them. Such a lot of them have, "Please burn this, dear, as soon as read," written across the upper corner, or at the foot.

I could not burn them—to me they were so wonderful, filled by a girl's reading, with all the glorious white thoughts that throng in the white heart of Youth. Some of them are soiled and frayed at the edges, some blotted with tears—not yours—and the heart's index tells how they too passed through the Crucible of Suffering.

Having them, I felt I was not alone.

I feel it now.

There are some letters of —— and the ——'s here also.

In one of them, demanding my silence as a daughter of the Church, he commends me "to seek guidance and comfort in the Blessed Virgin, Holy Mother of Sorrows," and "Queen of Heaven and all the Saints."

Beloved, I want to confess to you—my last confession to any priest.

I have never believed in the Virgin Mary being placed, as our Church places her, before God.

I never used to pray to her after I was twelve, when I began to think (does that sound blasphemous—I don't mean it to be), but I began to see that prayers straight to God Himself was the only way of Truth. I couldn't see how praying to the Virgin, and all the earth-created Saints could help. Some of them had such black lives. I think my

child-mind came early to that conclusion, reasoning it out, how a petition to the Dear Dad at home would appeal, if I went around each of our family for intercession, and then got Auntie in, or Dad's mother at the finish, to do my asking for me.

The Dear Dad could never bear anything but straightforwardness in any matter. I reasoned it out then that he would probably have said, "You come straight to me yourself, if you have anything to say." . . . "This is a matter between me and yourself only," and O, a hundred other God-given instinctive reasons show us the truth. Instinct is the voice of the Spirit.

I can't find anywhere in the Bible where the Virgin is the "Holy Mother of God," or that the Roman Catholics were to be deemed Her "Clients."

How that word does grate on one's very soul!

Yet, I saw the other day in a daily paper here where Father —— spoke of Roman Catholics as "clients."

Dearest, that seemed such blasphemy to me, such a dreadful confession of a superstition-saturated mind, in these enlightened days when the World is nearer to God than it has ever been.

We call this an enlightened age. We would obliterate in History those memories connected with our Church, that are stained with blood and shame, as we force them out of the schools that the new generation of Catholics may never know of the ghastly past.

That paragraph has haunted me with a horror—and pity—I can't describe.

“Clients of the Holy Mother of God! Virgin Queen of Heaven!”

The day I read it Spring was trembling into being, sky and sea blue as uncut turquoise, and the sun pouring down on God's Earth-world. Every flower and tree and shrub, every bird trilled aloud of a mighty Power beyond it all, and the new green baby-grass, and the first yellow crocus, were crying aloud the Divine message of Resurrection for all things.

It brought comfort—brought me near to that Divine throne of Truth and Wisdom, so near that balm came to my troubled heart—so near that I felt, as an old Protestant hymn says,

Nearer is He than breathing,
Closer than hands or feet.

I felt I had only to put out my hand and say, “Thank You, Dear God,” and those few words would have held a world of prayer, and with spring whispering of all things that died, regaining new birth and blossoming into beauty, I read the paper in which the notice I am enclosing appeared.

“Clients of the Virgin Mother of God”—her many grateful clients—requested to enclose donation.”

Dearest, I can only describe it as one might see, against a sunlit sky, suddenly a shadow fall, and looking upwards see a black, gibbering corpse

swinging from a gallows, mocking at the flower-messages of hope and resurrection, mocking at all things, mocking at God-given instinct, ay, even at God Himself. O, Beloved! How could any man believe those things?

How could any power force him to write them if he did not believe?

How could He help to bring back the Black Horrors that Superstition has written on the History of the World?

How dared he lift a pall between those poor ignorant souls—and God?

And this—is—our religion!

I seemed to see behind that paragraph a Giant Hand that pressed down over the Brain of the Roman Catholic World, and hear an evil Voice ring from out of the Dark Ages, echoing down the centuries into the Age of Light, with the cry of the Secret First Commandment of the Church.

“Thou . . . shalt . . . not . . . think.”

The very trees, the very grasses, seemed to feel that Shadow fall on them, as it fell on my heart, a heart that went out to those of the Loyal Hearts but Blinded Eyes.

“Clients of the Virgin Mother of God . . . Mary, Queen of Heaven . . . and of all Saints . . .”

And yet an Irish girl told me the other day that the priest who wrote that, told the following story a few years ago in her hearing in a suburban Town Hall here.

I put the story side by side with the enclosed paragraph.

Here is the story as he is alleged to have told it:—

Pat was very hard up one day—not even the price of a drink on him—so he went into the Roman Catholic Cathedral near by, and fell on his knees in front of the Blessed Virgin Mary (the statue) and prayed.

“O, Holy Mother of God, I haven’t the price of a bed. Give me four shillings—only four shillings—and I’ll turn over a new leaf entirely—I will indeed!”

He prayed so loudly that a priest in the sanctuary heard him, and listening to him, was “filled with compassion” for poor Pat. So he sneaked over, and when Pat had his head bowed in prayer, the priest put all the change he had on the altar of the Virgin.

When Pat looked up he saw it, and immediately counted it over. He stood outside the door, looking rather disappointed that it was short of the amount he prayed for. While the priest watched him, he went over to an hotel opposite, where he spent it in drink.

Afterwards he came back to the Cathedral again and started to pray.

“Holy Mary, lend me four shillings. Holy Mother of God, give me only four shillings.”

The priest, disgusted with Pat going over to the hotel, put on a sheet and stole up behind him.

“Begorra,” said Pat, “who is it? Who is it?”

"I'm God," said the priest in deep tones.

"Faith then," said Pat, mightily relieved, "you're the very fellow I wanted to see. Your Mother owes me tuppence."

O, Dearest! Dearest! is this sorry thing our Faith, the Faith of our Fathers of which we prate and sing? Is the Church putting out God altogether, recognising him only now and then, furtively always, as if ashamed?

Yesterday, a leading Roman Catholic here, said to me, "Don't let us speak of it—it makes me sick."

It makes me sick also—sick at heart, feeling that the great ever-brooding cloud of Superstition, that has hovered menacingly over our Church for centuries, and that we had dreamed was lifting, is settling down so heavily over this fair young country of ours."

The Black Night of the Middle Ages, shadowing the young receptive minds of the children of To-day, shall surely find a dreadful Dawning in another blood-drenched generation to come, for there is no Lutherism about the Protestantism of to-day. We are becoming no better, ah me, infinitely worse than the poor inland aborigines, with their gods of feathers and mud.

We pity them, we who are so infinitely more to be pitied, for by our very unresistance we are helping the Dark Ages of but a generation ahead.

You will understand how I feel I know, unless you have changed. Dearest, the one thing I could never understand in you, with all your learning, was your superstition.

Do you remember Halley's Comet? And how afraid you were! I cannot put down here all you said to me then in that fear, all you said of the Church, of life, of many things.

That incident was characteristic of you, even your getting so helplessly drunk on the night it was supposed to strike the earth. I remember how solemnly and indiscreetly you came to bid me goodbye, because you were assured you knew the very hour it was going to happen. I had no fear, believing the world was not created to be thus destroyed.

I remember you kneeling in St. ——'s Chapel praying, and a few hours afterwards you were drinking heavily, and had lost ten pounds gambling that night in ——'s Hotel.

It is when I think of these things—and you—that I realise by what tortuous road of obscured reasoning, by what winding, superstition-clouded paths your mind as a boy became moulded hard and fast ecclesiastically in the superstitious atmosphere of —— College; and I, in realising this, know also by what curious mental process that mind of yours worked out—or allowed itself to be dominated in working out—the problem of my life and yours. That I should suffer was to you the Church-ordained issue.

That you should ever have to answer for my soul—and that of another—never apparently entered your head.

Will you understand, dear Boy (you are that only, for all your years!), that it is not for the sake of the Church of my forefathers that I keep sacred

silence, that I sink my own life, that you may go on and prosper, that I have denied myself?

No! It is because the love I bear you gives me Understanding.

Until you stand alone I cannot put out one hand to bid you "Come."

And above all it is because of this, "Whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." No man, nor pope nor cardinal, archbishop or bishop or priest, or no man on the Ecclesiastical Ladder, can render that marriage of ours invalid.

Beyond it all, above it all, is the power that holds our lives—those lives "whom God hath joined together."

And so, through all my life I shall go alone, whatever its trials and vicissitudes, whatever sorrow, whatever joy—separated only by earthly distance that some day Light may bridge.

Dearest, I can bear that we be parted, but I cannot bear that you should ever impregnate the mind of your flock with that most insidious and infectious disease, Superstition.

That Religious Leprosy has rotted many a mind, has raged through many a fair country, has been the foretold AntiChrist of the world, and it must come to its pre-destined end.

Look at the blackened wastes behind it, and then fight the matter out between God and yourself. Remember, dear Boy, that there comes to others beside yourself a time when it seems as if an end has come to everything on earth, and that nothing can help.

In those times that have come to you in the past, you have used alcohol as an anodyne, till your mind has become blunted.

But there have been—there surely must have been—awakening Hours of Remorse.

By one of the roads I went in the Dreadful Time, striving for forgetfulness, I too—thinking of your deadened conscience—took your anodynes also. For those moments of forgetfulness I paid in remorse dearly. You may not be able to tell your flock these things from the altar. You would not be allowed

to do so in this Age of the Collecting Plate, but there will be many times, when, to a poor troubled mind, you can bring comfort by telling them the truth; that all the money for masses, the futile candles, the jewelled offerings to statues, are as nothing to one short prayer to "Our Father . . . who art in Heaven." Of all the sins the troubled soul tells most in confession, as you once told me, is that of Doubt. Has there ever been one Roman Catholic who has not confessed that he or she doubted his Church and its teachings? And all they are told, as we, is that it is the "Devil whispering and fighting for their soul," and that therefore we must redouble our prayers and good works to the Church in expiation.

I have long put by my rosary beads, scapulars and Agnus Dei's. It is a long, long while since I collected, and garnered up Indulgences, for a hastily gabbled prayer-phrase that ninety-nine times out of a hundred held no meaning. I know now—thank God most reverently—that all these things count as nothing beside the record of one's life.

This thing we call Life is given to us, a tablet on which we write the deeds by which we shall be judged in the after Reckoning, but in whose Final Addition priest nor layman shall have no part.

God was, long ages before this old world was created, long, long before the Church and its earth-canonized saints were created, long before Peter denied Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Church-saints are no more than we; only by the re-

cords of their not too blameless lives are they known to posterity.

How they are known in that Beyond, no one on Earth may know.

God is.

When we recognise that, Life takes on a holier aspect, a religion of the soul that needs no Church, That is the key to all problems that perplex us, the comfort of all who sorrow.

Had I not met and loved you, had you not desecrated that love, perhaps I had not found Light, nor given Light to others.

It is this that helps me now through these days, days which, alas! have their clouds and sad hours, but behind each cloud I know of the Light that silvers the edge.

And there is one phrase I hold in my heart. It goes with me through the days, through many a sleepless night, and it helps me to pray for you, to understand, to soften all the bitter, black trouble you brought into my life. I send it to you with all its comfort:—

“Behind all shadows standeth God.”

Behind all shadows!

There was a time—the remembrance of it has seared my soul—when life seemed ended for me. No man can ever understand for one moment what it means to be a woman, brokenhearted, frustrated, hopeless, despairing, with love grown cold, and friendship past.

I had no Hope, nor Faith, nor home, nor friends, because I had cast my all at the feet of the Church and Love, in the guise of you, had trodden them underfoot.

Afar off stood the Church, not as she preaches, holding out a helping hand, but with a bitter, watchful eye, and ever-ready with the weapons of calumny and abuse—that—perhaps because of constant use—never have grown old or rusty.

I knew the fight would be unequal.

Has it not proved so in all cases of the woman and the priest?

I knew also in that Hour that to some, Mammon was a god greater than any Divine Being.

Might, not Right, would prevail.

What weapon had I but a tarnished name—tarnished by you? It mattered not to the Church that a priest had tarnished it? . . .

I looked at the inky blackness of the Future. I

saw the Desolation of my life. And you, though the Church knew, you were preaching at the altar.

Will you ever know, I wonder, how near you were once to Eternity?

This then is a confession.

The only thing that saved you from being shot on the altar, and myself afterwards, was one of the ironies of Fate. Or was it Destiny that I was one minute late in catching the one train that took me to that little quiet, down-country town, in which would have ended the tragedy of our lives. It was in the night that followed, when I cried aloud heartbroken reproaches to the God that made all women, that the first glimmer of Light came to me.

Afterwards, in a ward in a city Hospital, where they put women who, finding Life too hard would take its ending into their own hands, God came to me—and He has not left me since.

Dear, I have made many mistakes, but I am trying to make of them now altar stones on which I kneel, so for the years I have on this Earth, God grant that I may do some good!

To you I shall write no more, because I do not desire to tempt you from your promise to ——. I do not say that I do not desire you. I have said in the beginning of this letter, as I say at its ending, that there will never come the day when I shall turn from you.

I repeat that which you said to me years ago at ——.

“Love, dear Heart, needs no papal dispensation.”

In the hours of thought that must come to you, when the many gods and goddesses of creed fail you, as they have failed many, go out into the open spaces with the sky above, and far fields and the Bush below. There in the communion of silence that is alive with sound, Nature—the High Priest—will turn Life's common bread-and-wine into the Holy Eucharist without the sacrilege that waits on many a chapel altar.

When that day comes, Beloved (God grant it may be before my eyes close on this earth)—when that day comes, for you the Ending will be but the Beginning.

God guide you.











UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

Los Angeles

This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

DUE

MAR 15 1962

MAR 15 1962



3 115 8195

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



AA 000 378 341 2

